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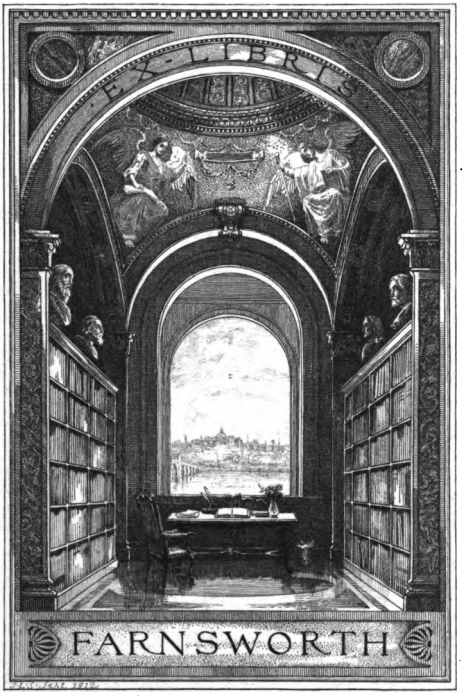

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THE ROMANCES OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

Handy Library Edition

Historical Romances

ASCANIO

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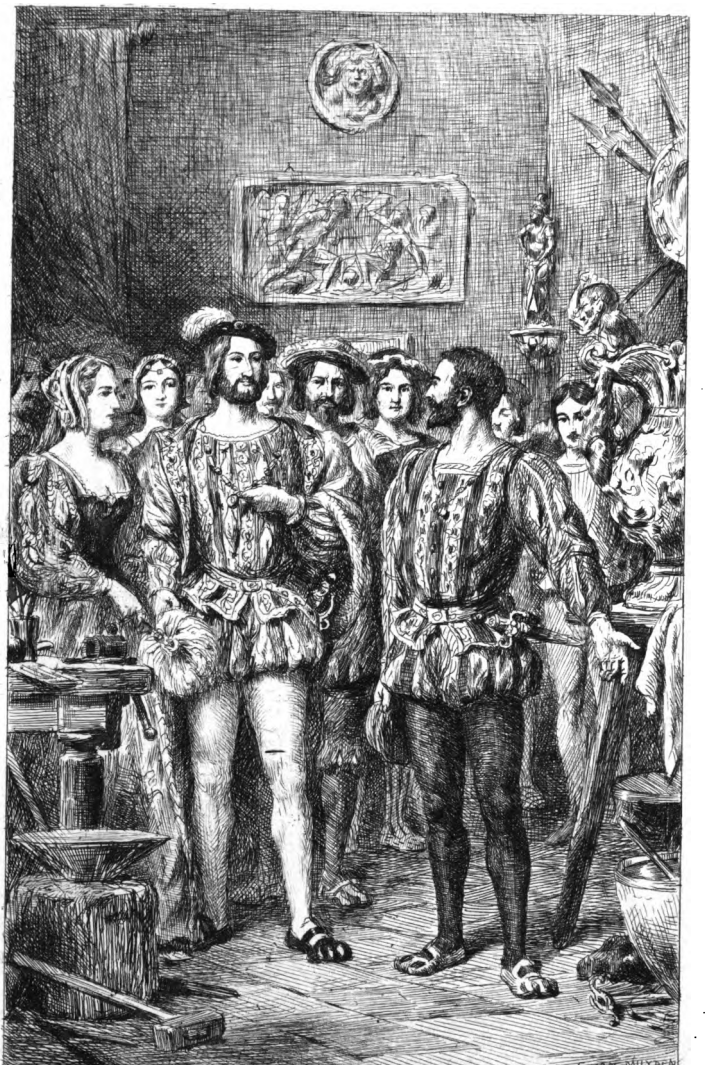

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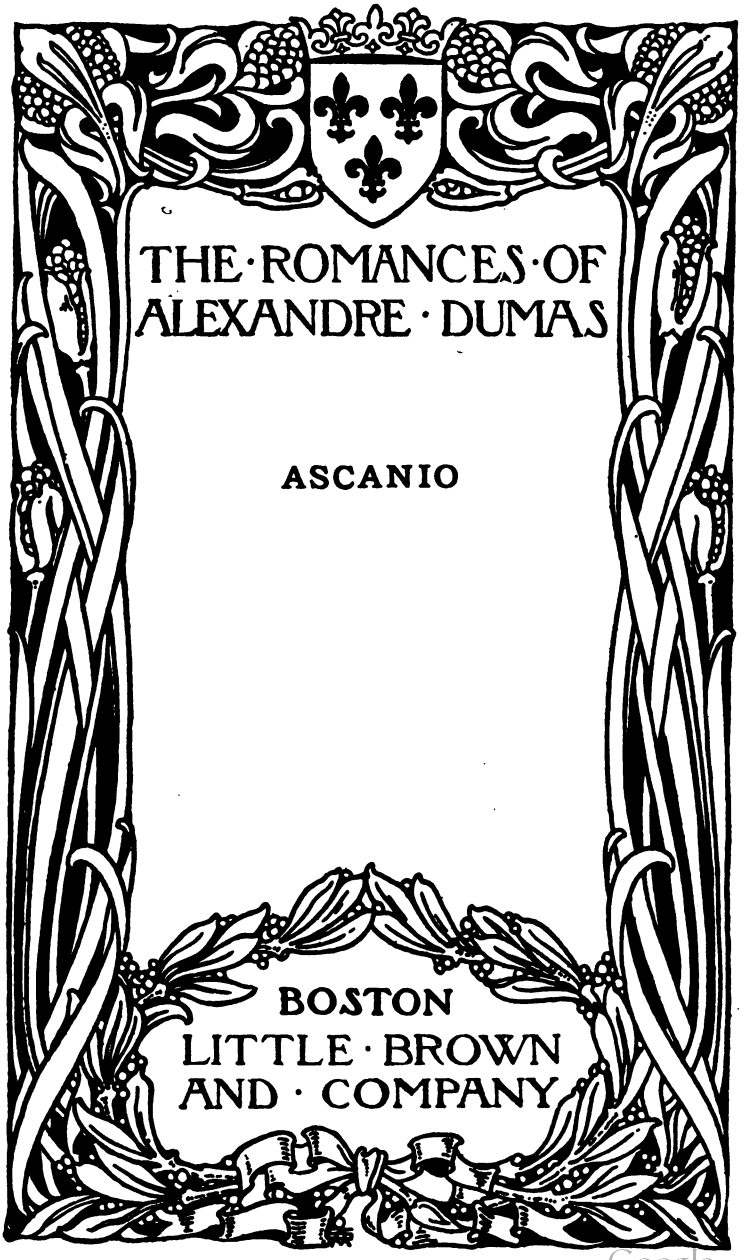

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

"NEVER perhaps," says Miss Pardoe (in the Preface to the "Court and Reign of Francis I."), "did the reign of any European sovereign present so many and such varying phases. A contest for empire, a captive monarch, a female regency, and a religious war; the poisoned bowl and the burning pile alike doing their work of death amid scenes of uncalculating splendor and unbridled dissipation; the atrocities of bigotry and intolerance, blent with the most unblushing licentiousness and the most undisguised profligacy;—such are the materials offered to the student by the times of Francis I."

The period thus characterized is that in which the scene of the present romance is laid, and although the plot is mainly concerned with the fortunes of others than subjects of the *Roi Chevalier*, we are treated to a succession of vivid pictures of life and manners at the French court and in the French capital.

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The author depicts the king rather as he appeared to the world before what has been called the "legend of the Roi Chevalier," — that is to say, the long prevailing idea that François I. was the most chivalrous monarch who ever sat upon a European throne, — had been modified by the independent researches of those who have not feared to go behind the writings of the old and well tutored chroniclers whose works have formed the basis of most modern histories, — chroniclers who seem to have been guided by Cardinal Richelieu's famous remark to an aspiring historian, apropos of certain animadversions upon the character of Louis XI., that "it is treason to discuss the actions of a king who has been dead only two centuries."

The result of these researches is thus summed up by Miss Pardoe in the same Preface: —

"The glorious day of Marignano saw the rising, and that of Pavia the setting, of his fame as a soldier; so true it is that the prowess of the man was shamed by that of the boy. The early and unregretted death of one of his neglected queens, and the heart-broken endurance of the other, contrasted with the unbounded influence of his first favorite and the insolent arrogance of his second, will sufficiently demonstrate his character as a husband. His open and illegal oppression of an

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overtaxed and suffering people to satisfy the cravings of an extortionate and licentious court, will suffice to disclose his value as a monarch; while the reckless indifference with which he falsified his political pledges, abandoned his allies in their extremity in order to further his own interests, and sacrificed the welfare of his kingdom and the safety of his armies to his own puerile vanity, will complete a picture by no means calculated to elicit one regret that his reign was not prolonged."

Victor Hugo dared to puncture the "legend," when, in the play of "Le Roi s'Amuse," he represented the "knightly king" as being enticed to a low water-side hovel by the charms of a girl of the street; but even the government of the Citizen King, Louis-Philippe, could not brook such an attack upon the "divinity that doth hedge a king," and, after the first performance in 1832, the strong hand of the censorship was laid upon the play, and fifty years elapsed before it again saw the light upon the stage.

The first titular favorite of King François, the Comtesse de Châteaubriand, whose character was in every respect diametrically opposed to that of her successor, was an object of dislike and dread to Louise de Savoie, the king's mother, because of her unbounded influence over François. When he returned to France, after his captivity in Spain

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following upon his defeat at Pavia, his passion for Madame de Châteaubriand was found to have increased rather than diminished. In looking about for some means to kill this passion, and in that way put an end to the influence of the favorite, Louise de Savoie was not obliged to go beyond the lovely and licentious circle of her own maids of honor. She found in Anne de Pisseleu, Mademoiselle d'Heilly, that combination of loveliness, youth, frailty, and forwardness which she required for her purpose, and so arranged her first presentation to the king that the desired effect was produced almost immediately. It was not long before a suitably complaisant husband was found for the new divinity, in the person of the Duc d'Etampes, and she had soon entirely supplanted Madame de Châteaubriand, driven her from court, and entered upon a period of queenly power and magnificence, which was to endure with little change or diminution for full twenty years, and until the death of her royal lover and slave in 1547.

"His excessive passion for the artful favorite blinded him to her vices," says Miss Pardoe. "Already had she taught him that her love was to be retained only by an entire devotion; and even while he suffered her to become the arbiter of his own actions, she betrayed him with a recklessness as bold as it was degrading. Nothing, moreover,

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could satisfy her rapacity; and while distress, which amounted almost to famine, oppressed the lower classes of the citizens, she greedily seized upon every opportunity of enriching herself and aggrandizing her family." [1]

The following passage from the same interesting and painstaking work, if compared with the episode in "Ascanio" of Madame d'Etampes's designs upon Colombe, will serve to illustrate the extreme fidelity to historical truth, even in what may seem to be minor matters, which so amply justifies the title of "Historical Romances" as applied to this and many other of Dumas's works: —

"We pass over, for obvious reasons, the minor influences, each perhaps insignificant in itself, but in the aggregate fearfully mischievous, which were exercised by the fair and frail maids of honor, each, or nearly each, being in her turn the 'Cynthia of the minute,' and more than one of whom owed her temporary favor to the Duchesse d'Etampes herself, whose secret intrigues and undisguised ambition absorbed more of her time than could have been left at her disposal, had she not provided the inconstant but exacting monarch with some new object of interest; and the tact with which she selected these facile beauties was not one of the

[1] The Court and Reign of Francis I., King of France, Vol. II. Chap. XI.

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least of her talents. Never, upon any occasion, did she direct the attention of the king to a woman whose intellect might have secured, after the spell of her beauty had ceased to attract him. The young and the lovely were her victims only when their youth and their loveliness were their sole attractions. She was ever ready to supply her royal lover with a new mistress, but never with a friend, a companion, or a counsellor; and then, as she had rightly foreseen, the French Sardanapalus soon became sated by the mere prettiness of his female satellites, and returned to his allegiance to herself, weaned, and more her slave than ever." [1]

A curious parallel in this regard may be noted between the course of the Duchesse d'Etampes and the similar one pursued by Madame de Pompadour, two centuries later, to maintain her power over the prematurely aged Louis XV. The policy of this "minister in petticoats" was embodied in the institution of the famous, or infamous, Parc-aux-Cerfs.

The request of the Emperor Charles V. to be allowed to pass through France on his way to chastise the rebellious people of Ghent, and the conflicting emotions to which it gave rise at the French court, have been much discussed by historians. It seems to have been the case that the Connétable

[1] Miss Pardoe, Vol. III. Chap. I.

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Anne de Montmorency — then in the prime of life, and whom readers of the "Two Dianas" will remember in his old age as the loser of the battle of Saint-Laurent, and the favored rival of King Henri II. in the affections of Diane de Poitiers — was the only one of the king's advisers who opposed requiring Charles to give sureties of his peaceable intentions, and to declare in writing that he traversed France only upon sufferance. The constable's advice was adopted, notwithstanding the opposition of Madame d'Etampes, who strongly urged the king to take revenge for his own imprisonment at Madrid by improving the opportunity to inflict the same treatment upon his life-long rival and adversary. The incident of Triboulet, the jester, and the tablets upon which he inscribed the names of the greatest fools in the world, is historical.

The anecdote of the presentation of the diamond ring by the Emperor to the favorite is told by Miss Pardoe substantially as by Dumas, but it is rejected by most historians of the time. There is no question, however, that the duchess was so alarmed by the condition of the king's health, which was prematurely impaired by his dissolute life, and so apprehensive of her own fate when he should be succeeded by the Dauphin Henri, then a willing slave to the charms of her bitter enemy, Diane de

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Poitiers, that she exerted herself to the utmost to win the affection of the young Duc d'Orléans, and to procure some sort of an independent government for him. All her plans in that direction were defeated by that prince's death of the plague in 1545.

The dazzling and voluptuous Diane de Poitiers, mistress of two kings of France, the beautiful and accomplished, but cruel and treacherous Catherine de Medicis, wife of one and mother of three, are familiar historical characters, with whom Dumas has dealt more fully in others of his works.

The learned and accomplished author of the "Heptameron," Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre and sister of François I., of whom we obtain a fleeting glimpse or two, is in many respects the most attractive personality of the time. It is a cause for deep regret, however, that her great affection for her brother did not lead her to exert her undoubted influence over him to a better end.

As we pass from the king and his immediate circle, to glance for a moment at the other characters, with whom and with certain passages in their lives the romance before us is mainly concerned, we venture to quote once more the same author so copiously quoted heretofore: —

"One merit must, however, be conceded to Anne

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de Pisseleu; and as throughout her whole career we have been unable to trace any other good quality which she possessed, it cannot be passed over in silence. Educated highly for the period, she loved study for its own sake, and afforded protection to men of letters; although it must be admitted that, wherever her passions or vanity were brought into play, she abandoned them and their interests without hesitation or scruple. Nevertheless it is certain that she co-operated, not only willingly, but even zealously, with the king, in attracting to the court of France all the distinguished talent of Europe." [1]

The favorite's passions and vanity were brought into play in the case of Benvenuto Cellini, and she certainly abandoned him and his interests without hesitation or scruple.

The principal source whence our knowledge of this extraordinary man is drawn, is his own Autobiography, which has been several times translated into English, most recently by that eminent author and critic, the late John Addington Symonds.

The following extracts from the translator's scholarly Introduction will serve a useful purpose in that they will show that the picture drawn of him by Dumas is in no sense exaggerated, and that he really possessed the extraordinary character-

[1] Miss Pardoe. Vol. II. Chap XI.

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istics attributed to him in the following pages, and which would seem almost incredible without some confirmatory evidence: —

"A book which the great Goethe thought worthy of translating into German with the pen of 'Faust' and 'Wilhelm Meister,' a book which Auguste Comte placed upon his very limited list for the perusal of reformed humanity, is one with which we have the right to be occupied, not once or twice, but over and over again.

. . . . . .

"No one was less introspective than this child of the Italian Renaissance. No one was less occupied with thoughts about thinking or with the presentation of psychological experience. Vain, ostentatious, self-laudatory, and self-engrossed as Cellini was, he never stopped to analyze himself. . . . The word 'confessions' could not have escaped his lips; a *Journal Intime* would have been incomprehensible to his fierce, virile spirit. His Autobiography is the record of action and passion. Suffering, enjoying, enduring, working with restless activity; hating, loving, hovering from place to place as impulse moves him; the man presents himself dramatically by his deeds and spoken words, never by his ponderings or meditative broodings.

"In addition to these solid merits, his life, as Horace Walpole put it, is 'more amusing than

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any novel.' We have a real man to deal with, — a man so realistically brought before us that we seem to hear him speak and see him move; a man, moreover, whose eminently characteristic works of art in a great measure still survive among us. Yet the adventures of this potent human actuality will bear comparison with those of Gil Blas, or the Comte de Monte Cristo, or Quentin Durward, or Les Trois Mousquetaires, for their variety and pungent interest.

. . . . . .

"But what was the man himself? It is just this question which I have half promised to answer, implying that, as a translator, I have some special right to speak upon the subject.

"Well, then: I seem to know Cellini first of all as a man possessed by intense, absorbing egotism; violent, arrogant, self-assertive, passionate; conscious of great gifts for art, physical courage, and personal address. . . . To be self-reliant in all circumstances; to scheme and strike, if need be, in support of his opinion or his right; to take the law into his own hands for the redress of injury or insult; — this appeared to him the simple duty of an honorable man. . . . He possessed the temperament of a born artist, blent in almost equal proportions with that of a born bravo. Throughout the whole of his tumultuous career these two

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strains contended in his nature for mastery. Upon the verge of fifty-six, when a man's blood has generally cooled, we find that he was released from prison on bail, and bound over to keep the peace for a year with some enemy whose life was probably in danger; and when I come to speak about his homicides, it will be obvious that he enjoyed killing live men quite as much as casting bronze statues.

. . . . . .

"He consistently poses as an injured man, whom malevolent scoundrels and malignant stars conspired to persecute. Nor does he do this with any bad faith. His belief in himself remained firm as adamant, and he candidly conceived that he was under the special providence of a merciful and loving God, who appreciated his high and virtuous qualities."

Bearing in mind that all the seemingly fabulous anecdotes related of Cellini, or put into his own mouth, by Dumas, are actually told by himself in his Autobiography, the conclusions of Mr. Symonds as to the artist's veracity cannot fail to be interesting: —

"Among Cellini's faults I do not reckon either baseness or lying. He was not a rogue, and he meant to be veracious. This contradicts the commonplace and superficial view of his character

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so flatly that I must support my opinion at some length. Of course I shall not deny that a fellow endowed with such overweening self-conceit, when he comes to write about himself, will set down much which cannot be taken entirely on trust. . . . Men of his stamp are certain to exaggerate their own merits, and to pass lightly over things not favorable to the ideal they present. But this is very different from lying; and of calculated mendacity Cellini stands almost universally accused. I believe that view to be mistaken."

Passing from general considerations to particular instances of Cellini's alleged falsehoods, the learned translator proceeds to discuss at some length many of the miraculous experiences and remarkable statements of Cellini, which are to be found in these volumes. For example, the founding of Florence by an imaginary ancestor of his own, named Fiorino da Cellino, a captain in the army of Julius Cæsar; and his claim that he shot the Constable of Bourbon from the ramparts of Rome in 1527, as to which Mr. Symonds says: "Bourbon had been shot dead in the assault of Rome upon that foggy morning, and Cellini had certainly discharged his arquebuse from the ramparts. . . . If it were possible to put his thoughts about this event into a syllogism, it would run as follows: 'Somebody shot Bourbon; I shot somebody; being what I am,

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I am inclined to think the somebody I shot was Bourbon."

It would be a much simpler task to make a list of the fictitious characters and incidents in "Ascanio," than to enumerate those whose existence or occurrence is well authenticated. Colombe and her governess are apparently creations of the novelist's brain, and the same is true of Hermann, little Jehan, Jacques Aubry and his light o' love. The Provost of Paris was Jean d'Estouteville, not Robert d'Estourville; but he was actually in possession of the Petit-Nesle, which was the abode granted to Benvenuto by a deed which is still extant, as are the letters of naturalization bestowed upon him. The trouble experienced by Cellini in obtaining possession of the Petit-Nesle is considerably overdrawn, and it does not appear that Ascanio was ever imprisoned. Ascanio's character throughout is represented in a different light from that in which it appears in the Autobiography, although he is there said to be "a lad of marvellous talents, and, moreover, so fair of person that every one who once set eyes on him seemed bound to love him beyond measure." Benvenuto had much trouble with him, and used continually to beat him; and he was very wroth when he found that his apprentice had been using the head of the mammoth statue of Mars as a trysting place, where he was accustomed to meet

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a frail damsel of his acquaintance. Benvenuto tells the story of the injury to the hand of Raffaello del Moro's daughter, and of his own share in her cure; but the element of romance is altogether wanting in his own narrative of the relations between himself and that "very beautiful" young woman.

Catherine and Scozzone (Scorzone) were two women, not one, both models and ephemeral mistresses of the artist. The episode of the amours of Pagolo and Catherine is a very much softened version of an almost unreadable passage in the memoirs. Of the episode itself, as told by Cellini, Mr. Symonds says that it is one over which his biographers would willingly draw the veil.

It is impossible to imagine a more natural consequence of Benvenuto's peculiar temperament than his absolute failure to make himself *persona grata* to the arrogant, self-seeking mistress of the King of France. François was oftentimes hard put to it to reconcile his admiration for the work of the artist with his desire to please the favorite; but in presence of one of his masterpieces the former sentiment generally carried the day, — notably on the occasion of the exhibition of the Jupiter at Fontainebleau, in competition with the antique statues brought from Rome by Primaticcio. After describing the scene in the gallery substantially as it is

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described in the novel, Cellini says: "The king departed sooner than he would otherwise have done," (on account of the rage of the duchess,) "calling aloud, however, to encourage me, 'I have brought from Italy the greatest man who ever lived, endowed with all the talents.'"

A passage in Mr. Symonds's Introduction to the Life, too long to be quoted here, shows that Benvenuto left France somewhat under a cloud, and followed by suspicions of dishonest dealing, which have never been quite satisfactorily cleared away.

Enough has been said to show that in this book, as always in his historical romances, Dumas has substantially rewritten a chapter of history, — for the visit of Benvenuto Cellini to Paris has been deemed worthy of notice at considerable length by more than one grave chronicler; and he has again demonstrated his very exceptional power of interweaving history and fiction in such a way as to make each embellish the other.

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LIST OF CHARACTERS.

Period, 1540.

FRANÇOIS I., King of France.
ELEANORA, his queen, sister to Charles V.
THE DAUPHIN, afterwards Henri II.
CHARLES D'ORLÉANS, the king's second son.
THE DAUPHINE, Catherine de Medicis.
THE EMPEROR CHARLES V.
THE KING OF NAVARRE.
MARGUERITE DE VALOIS, Queen of Navarre.
ANNE DE PISSELEU, Duchesse d'Etampes, favorite of François I
DIANE DE POITIERS.
BENVENUTO CELLINI, a Florentine artist.
ASCANIO, his pupil.
MESSIRE ROBERT D'ESTOURVILLE, Provost of Paris.
COLOMBE, his daughter.
COMTE D'ORBEC, the king's treasurer.
VICOMTE DE MARMAGNE, a suitor for Colombe's hand.
THE DUKE OF MEDINA-SIDONIA, ambassador of Charles V.
MONSIEUR DE MONTBRION, governor of Charles d'Orléans.

CONSTABLE ANNE DE MONTMORENCY,
CHANCELLOR POYET,
CARDINAL DE TOURNON,
MESSIRE ANTOINE LE MAÇON,
COMTE DE LA FAYE,
MARQUIS DES PRÉS,
MELIN DE SAINT-GELAIS,
M. DE TERMES,
HENRI D'ESTIENNE,
} of the French Court.

PIETRO STROZZI, a Florentine refugee.

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TRIBOULET, the king's jester.
FRANÇOIS RABELAIS.
CLEMENT MAROT.
PAGOLO, JEHAN, SIMON LE-GAUCHER, HERMANN, } assistants of Cellini.
SCOZZONE, Cellini's model.
RUPERTA, servant to Cellini.
DAME PERRINE, Colombe's governess.
PULCHERIA, her assistant.
MASTER JACQUES, Messire d'Estourville's gardener.
ISABEAU, attendant of Madame d'Etampes.
ANDRÉ, physician to Madame d'Etampes.
JACQUES AUBRY, a student, attaching himself to the service of Cellini.
GERVAISE-PERRETTE POPINOT, a grisette.
FRANCESCO PRIMATICCIO, a painter, friend to Cellini.
GUIDO, a Florentine physician.
FERRANTE, FRACASSO, PROCOPE, MALEDENT, } bravos employed by Vicomte de Marmagne.
THE LIEUTENANT CRIMINAL OF THE PALAIS DE JUSTICE.
MARC-BONIFACE GRIMOINEAU, his clerk.
ETIENNE RAYMOND, a prisoner at the Châtelet.
A PRIEST AT THE CHÂTELET.
POPE CLEMENT VII.
MASTER GEORGIO, governor of the Castle of San Angelo.
MONSEIGNEUR DE MONTLUC, French ambassador at Rome.
POMPEO, a goldsmith at Rome.
RAPHAEL DEL MORO, a Florentine goldsmith.
STEFANA, his daughter.
GISMONDO GADDI, a confrère of Del Moro.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ASCANIO

Part First

Francis I. visits Benvenuto Cellini . . . . . *Frontispiece*

Part Second

All the workmen joined in a cry of admiration *Frontispiece*

"'Your majesty is losing your ring,' said Anne" . *Page* 98

From Drawings and etched by E. Van Muyden.

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ASCANIO.

PART FIRST.

I.

THE STREET AND THE STUDIO.

Time, four o'clock in the afternoon of the tenth day of July in the year of grace 1540. Place, the entrance to the church Des Grands Augustins, within the precincts of the University, by the receptacle for holy water near the door.

A tall, handsome youth, olive-skinned, with long waving locks and great black eyes, simply but elegantly clad, his only weapon a little dagger with a hilt of marvellous workmanship, was standing there, and, doubtless from motives of pure piety and humility, had not stirred from the spot throughout the vespers service. With head bowed in an attitude of devout contemplation, he was murmuring beneath his breath I know not what words, — his prayers let us hope, — for he spoke so low that none but himself and God could hear what he might say. As the service drew near its close, however, he raised his voice slightly, and they who stood nearest him could hear these half-audible words: —

"How wretchedly these French monks drone out their psalms! Could they not sing more melodiously before her, whose ear should be accustomed to angels' voices!

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Ah! this is well; the vespers are at an end at last. Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! grant that I be more fortunate to-day than on last Sunday, and that she do at least raise her eyes to my face!"

This last prayer was most artful, in very truth; for if she to whom it was addressed should chance to raise her eyes to the suppliant's face, she would see the most adorable youthful head that she had ever seen in dreams, while reading the clever mythological tales which were so fashionable at the time, by virtue of the charming couplets of Master Clement Marot, and which told of the loves of Psyche and the death of Narcissus. Indeed, beneath his simple sober-hued costume, the youth whom we have introduced to our readers was remarkably handsome, and wore an air of unmistakable refinement: moreover, his smile was infinitely sweet and attractive, and his glance, which dared not yet be bold, was as ardent and impassioned as ever flashed from the great speaking eyes of eighteen years.

Meanwhile, upon hearing the movement of many chairs announcing the end of the service, our lover, — for the reader will have discovered from the few words he has uttered that he is entitled to be so described, — our lover, I say, drew aside a little, and watched the congregation pass silently forth, — a congregation composed of staid church-wardens, respectable matrons past their giddy days, and prepossessing damsels. But for none of these had the youth come thither, for his glance did not brighten, nor did he step impulsively forward, until he saw approach a maiden dressed in white, and attended by a duenna, — a duenna of high station, be it understood, — who seemed accustomed to the ways of society, a duenna not unyouthful nor unattractive, and by no means savage in appearance. When the two ladies approached the

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basin of holy water, our youth took some of the liquid and gallantly offered it to them.

The duenna bestowed the most gracious of smiles and most grateful of courtesies upon him, and even touched his fingers as she took the cup, which, to his great chagrin, she herself handed to her companion; but the latter, notwithstanding the fervent prayer whereof she had been the object a few moments before, kept her eyes constantly upon the ground, — a sure proof that she knew the comely youth was there, — so that the comely youth, when she had passed, stamped upon the flags, muttering, "Alas! again she did not see me." An equally sure proof that the comely youth was, as we have said, no more than eighteen years old.

But after the first burst of vexation, our unknown hastened down the steps of the church, and, seeing that the absent-minded beauty, having lowered her veil and taken her attendant's arm, had turned to the right, hastened to take the same direction, observing that his own home chanced to lie that way. The maiden followed the quay as far as Pont Saint-Michel, and crossed Pont Saint-Michel; still it was our hero's road. She next passed through Rue de la Barillerie, and crossed Pont au Change; and as she was still pursuing our hero's road, our hero followed her like her shadow.

Every pretty girl's shadow is a lover.

But alas! when she reached the Grand Châtelet, the lovely star, whereof our unknown had made himself the satellite, was suddenly eclipsed: the wicket of the royal prison opened the instant that the duenna knocked, and closed again behind them.

The young man was taken aback for a moment; but as he was a very decided fellow when there was no pretty girl at hand to weaken his resolution, he very soon made up his mind what course to pursue.

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A sergeant, pike on shoulder, was walking sedately back and forth before the door of the Châtelet. Our youthful unknown followed the example of the worthy sentinel, and, having walked on a short distance to avoid observation, but not so far as to lose sight of the door, he heroically began his amorous sentry-go.

If the reader has ever done sentry duty in the course of his life, he must have noticed that one of the surest means of making the time pass quickly is to commune with one's self. Our hero doubtless was accustomed to such duty, for he had hardly begun his promenade when he addressed the following monologue to himself: —

"Assuredly it cannot be that she lives in yonder prison. This morning after mass, and these last two Sundays when I dared not follow her save with my eyes, — dullard that I was! — she turned not to the right upon the quay, but to the left, toward the Porte de Nesle, and the Pré-aux-Clercs. What the devil brings her to the Châtelet? What can it be? To see a prisoner, perhaps, her brother 't is most like. Poor girl! she must suffer cruelly, for doubtless she is as sweet and kind as she is lovely. Pardieu! I 'm sorely tempted to accost her, ask her frankly who it is, and offer my services. If it be her brother, I 'll tell the patron the whole story, and ask his advice. When one has escaped from the Castle of San Angelo, as he has, one has a shrewd idea of the best way to get out of prison. There 's no more to be said: I 'll save her brother. After I have rendered him such a service, he 'll be my friend for life and death. Of course he 'll ask me then what he can do for me when I have done so much for him. Then I 'll confess that I love his sister. He 'll present me to her, and then we 'll see if she won't raise her eyes."

Once launched upon such a course, we need not say how

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a lover's thoughts flow on unchecked. Thus it was that our youth was vastly amazed to hear the clock strike four, and see the sentinel relieved.

The new sergeant began his promenade, and the young man resumed his. His method of passing time had succeeded too well for him not to continue to make use of it; so he resumed his discourse upon a theme no less fruitful of ideas than the other: —

"How lovely she is! how graceful every movement! how modest her bearing! how classic the outline of her features! There is in the whole world no other than Leonardo da Vinci or the divine Raphael, worthy to reproduce the image of that chaste and spotless being; nor would they prove equal to the task, save at the very zenith of their talent. O mon Dieu! why am not I a painter, rather than a sculptor, worker in enamel, or goldsmith? First of all, were I a painter, there 'd be no need that I should have her before my eyes to make her portrait. I should never cease to see her great blue eyes, her beautiful blonde tresses, her pearly skin and slender form. Were I a painter, I should paint her face in every picture, as Sanzio did with Fornarina, and Andrea del Sarto with Lucrezia. And what a contrast betwixt her and Fornarina! in sooth, neither the one nor the other is worthy to unloose her shoe laces. In the first place, Fornarina — "

The youth was not at the end of his comparisons, which were, as the reader will imagine, uniformly to the advantage of his inamorata, when the hour struck.

The second sentinel was relieved.

"Six o'clock! 'T is strange how the time flies!" muttered the youth, "and if it flies thus quickly while I wait for her, how should it be if I were by her side! Ah! by her side I should lose count of time; I should be in

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paradise. If I were by her side, I should but look at her, and so the hours and days and months would pass. What a blissful life that would be, mon Dieu!" and the young man lost himself in an ecstatic reverie; for his mistress, though absent, seemed to pass in person before his eyes, — the eyes of a true artist.

The third sentinel was relieved.

Eight o'clock struck on all the parish churches, and the shades of night began to fall, for all authorities are in accord that the twilight hour in July three hundred years ago was in the neighborhood of eight o'clock, as now; but what is perhaps more astonishing than that is the fabulous perseverance of a sixteenth century lover. All passions were ardent in those days, and vigorous young hearts no more stopped short in love than in art or war.

However, the patience of the young artist — for he has let us into the secret of his profession — was rewarded at last, when he saw the ponderous door of the Châtelet open for the twentieth time, but this time to give passage to her for whom he was waiting. The same chaperon was still at her side, and furthermore, two archers of the provost's guard followed ten paces behind her, as escort.

They retraced the steps they had taken four hours earlier, to wit the Pont au Change, Rue de la Barillerie, Pont Saint-Michel, and the quays; but they kept on by the Grands Augustins, and some three hundred yards beyond paused before a huge door in a recess in the wall, beside which was another smaller door for the servants' use. The duenna knocked at the great door, which was opened by the porter. The two archers, after saluting their charge with the utmost respect, returned to the Châtelet, and our artist found himself standing for the second time outside a closed door.

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He would probably have remained there until morning, for he was fairly embarked on the fourth series of his dreams; but chance willed that a passer by, who had imbibed something too freely, collided violently with him.

"Hola there, friend!" said the new arrival, "by your leave, are you a man or a post? If so be you 're a post, you 're within your rights and I respect you; but if you be a man, stand back, and let me pass."

"Pray pardon me," rejoined the distraught youth, "but I am a stranger in this good city of Paris, and —"

"Oh! that 's another matter; the Frenchman is always hospitable, and I ask your pardon; you 're a stranger, good. As you have told me who you are, it 's only fair that I should tell you who I am. I am a student, and my name is —"

"Excuse me," interposed the young artist, "but before I know who you are, I would be very glad to know where I am."

"Porte de Nesle, my dear friend; this is the Hôtel de Nesle," said the student, with a glance at the great door from which the stranger had not once removed his eyes.

"Very good; and to reach Rue Saint-Martin, where I live, which direction must I take?" said our lovelorn youth, for the sake of saying something, and hoping thus to be rid of his companion.

"Rue Saint-Martin, do you say? Come with me, I 'm going that way, and at Pont Saint-Michel I 'll show you how you must go. As I was saying, I am a student, I am returning from the Pré-aux-Clercs, and my name is —"

"Do you know to whom the Hôtel de Nesle belongs?' asked the young stranger.

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"Marry! I rather think I know my University! The Hôtel de Nesle, young man, belongs to our lord, the king, and is at this moment in the hands of Robert d'Estourville, Provost of Paris."

"How say you! that the Provost of Paris lives there?"

"By no means did I tell you that the Provost of Paris lives there, my son: the Provost of Paris lives at the Grand Châtelet."

"Ah, yes! at the Grand Châtelet! Then that's the explanation. But how happens it that the provost lives at the Grand Châtelet, and yet the king leaves the Hôtel de Nesle in his possession?"

"'T is thus. The king, you see, had given the Hôtel de Nesle to our bailli, a most venerable man, who stood guard over the privileges of the University, and tried all suits against it in most paternal fashion: superb functions his! Unhappily our excellent bailli was so just — so just — to us, that his office was abolished two years since, upon the pretext that he used to sleep when hearing causes, as if *bailli* were not derived from *bâiller* (to yawn). His office being thus suppressed, the duty of protecting the interests of the University was intrusted to the Provost of Paris. A fine protector, on my word! as if we could not quite as well protect ourselves! Now, our said provost — dost thou follow me, my child? — our said provost, who is most rapacious, opined that, since he succeeded to the bailli's office, he ought at the same time to inherit his possessions, and so he quietly laid hold of the Grand and Petit-Nesle, thanks to the patronage of Madame d'Etampes."

"And yet, you say, he does not occupy it."

"Not he, the villain. I think, however, that the old Cassandre lodges a daughter there, or niece, a lovely child called Colombe or Colombine, or some such name, and

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keeps her under lock and key in a corner of the Petit Nesle."

"Ah! is it so?" exclaimed the artist, hardly able to breathe, for it was the first time that he had heard his mistress's name; "this usurpation seems to me a shocking abuse. What! this vast hotel to shelter one young girl with her duenna!"

"Whence comest thou, O stranger, not to know that nothing comes to pass more naturally than this abuse, — that we poor clerks should live six together in a wretched garret, while a great nobleman casts this immense property with its gardens, lawns, and tennis-court to the dogs!"

"Ah! there is a tennis-court!"

"Magnificent, my son! magnificent!"

"But this Hôtel de Nesle, you say, is actually the property of King François I."

"To be sure: but what would you have King François I. do with this property of his?"

"Why, give it to others, as the provost doesn't occupy it."

"Very good! then go and ask it of him for yourself."

"Why not? Tell me, does the game of tennis please your fancy?"

"I fairly dote on it."

"In that case I invite you to a game with me next Sunday."

"Where, pray?"

"At the Hôtel de Nesle."

"Gramercy! my lord grand master of the royal châteaux! 'Tis meet that you should know my name at least —"

But as the young stranger knew all that he cared to

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know, and as the rest probably interested him but little, he heard not a word of his new friend's story, as he proceeded to tell him in detail that his name was Jacques Aubry, that he was a scrivener at the University, and was now returning from the Pré-aux-Clercs, where he had had an assignation with his tailor's wife ; that she, detained no doubt by her wrathful spouse, did not appear ; that he had consoled himself for Simonne's absence by drinking good Suresne ; and, lastly, that he proposed to withdraw his custom from the discourteous Master Snip, who compelled him to wear himself out with waiting, and to get tipsy, which was altogether opposed to all his habits.

When the two young men reached Rue de la Harpe, Jacques Aubry pointed out to our unknown the road he was to follow, which he knew even better than his informant: they then made an appointment for the following Sunday at noon at the Porte de Nesle, and parted, one singing, the other dreaming.

He who dreamed had abundant food for dreaming, for he had learned more during that one evening than in the three weeks preceding.

He had learned that the maiden to whom he had given his heart, lived at the Petit-Nesle, that she was the daughter of Messire Robert d'Estourville, Provost of Paris, and that her name was Colombe. As will be seen, he had not wasted his day.

Still dreaming he turned into Rue Saint-Martin, and stopped before a handsome house, over the door of which were carved the arms of the Cardinal of Ferrara. He knocked three times.

"Who 's there?" demanded a fresh, resonant young voice from within, after an interval of a few seconds.

"I, Dame Catherine," replied the unknown.

"Who are you?"

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"Ascanio."

"Ah! at last!"

The door opened, and Ascanio entered.

A charming girl of some eighteen to twenty years, rather dark, rather small, very quick of movement, and admirably well shaped withal, welcomed him with transports of joy.

"Here's the deserter! here he is!" she cried, and ran, or rather bounded on before, to announce him, extinguishing the lamp she carried, and leaving open the street door, which Ascanio, less giddy-pated than she, was careful to secure.

The young man, although Dame Catherine's precipitation left him in darkness, walked with assured step across a courtyard of considerable size, in which every tile was surrounded by a border of rank weeds, the whole dominated by a sombre mass of tall buildings of somewhat severe aspect. It was the frowning and humid dwelling-place of a cardinal, although its master had not for a long time dwelt therein.

Ascanio sprang lightly up a flight of moss-grown steps, and entered a vast hall, the only room in the house that was lighted, — a sort of conventual refectory, ordinarily dark and gloomy and untenanted, but which for two months past had been filled with light and life and music.

For two months past, in truth, this cold colossal cell had been instinct with bustling, laughing, good-humored life; for two months past, ten work-benches, two anvils, and an improvised forge had seemed to lessen the size of the vast room; sketches, models, benches laden with pincers, hammers, and files, sheaves of swords with chased hilts of marvellous workmanship, and carved open-work blades, helmets, cuirasses, and bucklers, gold-embossed,

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whereon the loves of the gods and goddesses were portrayed in relief, as if to turn the mind away from the purpose for which they were destined to be used, had covered the grayish walls. The sun had freely found its way in through the wide-open windows, and the air had been filled with the songs of joyous, active workers.

A cardinal's refectory had become a goldsmith's workshop.

However, during this evening of July 10, 1540, the sanctity of the Sabbath had temporarily restored to the newly enlivened apartment the tranquillity in which it had lain dormant for a century. But a table, upon which the remains of an excellent supper lay about in confusion, lighted by a lamp which one would take to have been stolen from the ruins of Pompeii, of so chaste and delicate a form was it, proved that, if the temporary occupants of the cardinal's mansion did sometimes enjoy repose, they were in no wise addicted to fasting.

When Ascanio entered there were four persons in the workshop.

These four persons were an old maid servant, who was removing the dishes from the table, Catherine, who was relighting the lamp, a young man sketching in a corner, and waiting for the lamp which Catherine had taken from before him in order to continue his work, and the master, standing with folded arms, and leaning against the forge.

The last would inevitably have been the first to be observed by any one entering the workshop.

Indeed, there was an indescribable impression of life and power which emanated from this remarkable personage, and attracted the attention even of those who would have chosen to withhold it. He was a tall, spare, powerful man of some forty years; but it would have needed

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the chisel of Michel-Angelo or the pencil of Ribeira to trace the outline of that clear-cut profile, to reproduce that sparkling olive complexion, to depict that bold, almost kingly expression. His lofty forehead towered above eyebrows quick to frown; his straight-forward piercing glance flashed at times with a light that was almost sublime; his frank, good-humored smile, albeit somewhat satirical, fascinated and awed you at the same time; he was accustomed to stroke his black beard and moustache with his hand, which was not precisely small, but nervous, supple, with long fingers and great strength, but withal slender and aristocratic; lastly, in his way of looking at you, speaking, turning his head, in all his quick, expressive, but not intemperate gestures, even in the careless attitude in which he was standing when Ascanio entered, his strength made itself felt; the lion in repose was none the less the lion.

Catherine and the apprentice working in the corner formed a most striking contrast to each other. The latter, a sombre, taciturn fellow, with a narrow forehead already furrowed with wrinkles, half shut eyes, and compressed lips; she as blithe as a bird and blooming as a flower, with the most mischievous of eyes always to be seen beneath her restless eyelids, and the whitest of teeth within her mouth, constantly half opened with a smile. The apprentice, buried in his corner, was slow and languid in his movements, as if economizing his strength; Catherine was here and there, going and coming, never remaining one second in one spot, so did her youthful active organization overflow with life and spirits, and feel the need of constant movement in default of excitement.

Thus she was the fairy of the household, a very skylark by virture of her vivacity, and her clear, piercing

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note, beginning life with such a joyous disregard of everything beyond the moment as to fully justify the surname of *Scozzone* which the master had given her; an Italian word which signified then, and still signifies, something very like *casse-cou* (break-neck). And yet, with all her childish ways, Scozzone was so instinct with witchery and charm that she was the life and soul of the household; when she sang all the others were silent; when she laughed they laughed with her; when she ordered they obeyed without a word, — albeit she was not ordinarily exacting in her caprice; and then she was so frankly and innocently happy, that she diffused an atmosphere of good humor wherever she went, and it made others glad to see her gladness.

Her story was an old, old story, to which we may perhaps recur: an orphan, born of the people, she was abandoned in her infancy, but God protected her. Destined to afford pleasure to everybody, she met a man to whom she afforded pure happiness.

Having introduced these new characters, we now resume the thread of our narrative where we let it drop.

"Aha! whence comest thou, gadabout?" said the master to Ascanio.

"Whence do I come? I come from gadding about for you, master."

"Since morning?"

"Since morning."

"Say rather that thou hast been in quest of adventure?"

"What manner of adventure should I have been in quest of, master?" murmured Ascanio.

"How can I know, pray?"

"Well, well! and if it were so, where's the harm?" interposed Scozzone. "Indeed, he's a pretty boy enough

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to have adventures run after him, even though he run not after adventures."

"Scozzone!" said the master with a frown.

"Come, come! don't you be jealous of him, too, poor, dear boy!" And she raised Ascanio's chin with her hand. "Ah, well! it only needed that. But, Jesu! how pale you are! Does it happen that you have n't supped, monsieur vagabond?"

"Faith, no," cried Ascanio; "I forgot it."

"Oho! in that case I take sides with the master; he forgot that he had not supped, so he must be in love. Ruperta! Ruperta! bring supper for Messire Ascanio at once."

The servant produced several dishes of appetizing relics of the evening meal, which our hero pounced upon with an appetite by no means unnatural after his prolonged exercise in the open air.

Scozzone and the master watched him, smiling the while, one with sisterly affection, the other with a father's love. The young man at work in the corner had raised his head when Ascanio entered; but as soon as Scozzone replaced in front of him the lamp she had taken when she ran to open the door, he bent his head over his work once more.

"I was saying, master, that it was for you I have been running about all day," resumed Ascanio, noticing the mischievous expression of the master and Scozzone, and desiring to lead the conversation to some other subject than his love affairs.

"How hast thou run about all day for me? Let us hear."

"Did you not say yesterday that the light was very bad here, and that you must have another studio?"

"Even so."

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"Suppose he will not! — What do men call me, Ascanio?"

"They call you Benvenuto Cellini, master."

"Which means that if the worthy provost will not do things with good grace, why, we will use force to compel him to do them. And now let us to bed. To-morrow we 'll speak further on the matter, and then the sun will shine, and we shall see more clearly."

At the master's suggestion all retired except Pagolo, who remained for some time at work in his corner; but as soon as he believed that all were safely in bed, the apprentice rose, looked about, drew near the table, and poured for himself a large cup of wine, which he swallowed at a draught. Then he too went off to bed.

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II.

A GOLDSMITH OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

SINCE we have drawn the portrait and mentioned the name of Benvenuto Cellini, we crave the reader's permission, that he may the more understandingly approach the artistic subject of which we propose to treat, to indulge in a short digression upon this extraordinary man, who at this time had been living in France for two months, and who is destined to become one of the principal characters of this history.

But first of all let us say a word as to the goldsmiths of the sixteenth century.

There is at Florence a bridge called the Ponte-Vecchio, which is covered with houses to this day; these houses were in the old days goldsmiths' shops.

But the word is not to be understood as we understand it to-day. The goldsmith of our day follows a trade; formerly, the goldsmith was an artist.

So it was that there was nothing in the world so wondrously beautiful as these shops, or rather as the articles with which they were stocked. There were round cups of onyx, around which dragons' tails were twined, while heads and bodies of those fabulous creatures confronted one another with gold-bespangled sky-blue wings outspread, and with jaws wide open like chimeras, shot threatening glances from their ruby eyes. There were ewers of agate, with a festoon of

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ivy clinging round the base, and climbing up in guise of handle well above the orifice, concealing amid its emerald foliage some marvellous bird from the tropics, in brilliant plumage of enamel, seemingly alive and ready to burst forth in song. There were urns of lapis-lazuli, over the edge of which leaned, as if to drink, lizards chiselled with such art that one could almost see the changing reflection of their golden cuirasses, and might have thought that they would fly at the least sound, and seek shelter in some crevice in the wall. Then there were chalices and monstrances, and bronze and gold and silver medallions, all studded with precious stones, as if in those days rubies, topazes, carbuncles, and diamonds could be found by searching in the sand on river banks, or in the dust of the highroad; and there were nymphs, naiads, gods, goddesses, a whole resplendent Olympus, mingled with crucifixes, crosses, and Calvarys; Mater Dolorosas, Venuses, Christs, Apollos, Jupiters launching thunderbolts, and Jehovahs creating the world; and all this not only cleverly executed, but poetically conceived; not only admirable, viewed as ornaments for a woman's boudoir, but magnificent masterpieces fit to immortalize the reign of a king or the genius of a nation.

To be sure, the goldsmiths of that epoch bore the names of Donatello, Ghiberti, Guirlandajo, and Benvenuto Cellini.

Now, Benvenuto Cellini has himself described in his memoirs, which are more interesting than the most interesting novel, the adventurous life of the artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when Titian was painting in coat of mail, when Michel-Angelo was sculpturing with his sword at his side, when Masaccio and Domenichino died of poison, and Cosmo I. secluded

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himself in his laboratory to discover the mode of tempering steel so that it would cut porphyry.

To show the character of the man, we will take a single episode in his life, — that which was the occasion of his coming to France.

Benvenuto was at Rome, whither Pope Clement VII. had summoned him, and was at work with characteristic ardor upon the beautiful chalice which his Holiness had ordered; but as he desired to display his talent at its best upon the precious work, he made but slow progress. Now, Benvenuto, as may well be imagined, had many rivals, who envied him the many valuable orders he received from the Pope, as well as the marvellous skill with which he executed them. The result was that one of his confrères, named Pompeo, who had nothing to do but slander his betters, took advantage of the delay to do him all possible injury in the Pope's sight, and kept at work persistently, day in and day out, without truce or relaxation, sometimes in undertones, sometimes aloud, assuring him that he would never finish it, and that he was so overwhelmed with orders that he executed those of other people to the neglect of his Holiness's.

He said and did so much, did good Pompeo, that when Benvenuto Cellini saw him enter his workshop one day with smiling face, he divined at once that he was the bearer of bad news for him.

"Well, my dear confrère," Pompeo began, "I have come to relieve you from a heavy burden. His Holiness realizes that your neglect in completing his chalice is not due to lack of zeal, but to lack of time; he therefore considers it no more than just to relieve you from some one of your important duties, and of his own motion he dismisses you from the post of Engraver to the Mint.

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It will be nine paltry ducats a month less in your pocket, but an hour more each day at your disposal."

Benvenuto was conscious of an intense longing to throw the jeering varlet out of window, but he restrained his feelings, and Pompeo, seeing that not a muscle of his face moved, thought that he had missed his aim.

"Furthermore," he continued, "why, I know not, but in spite of all that I could say in your behalf, his Holiness demands his chalice at once, in whatever condition it may be. Verily, I am afraid, dear Benvenuto, I say it in all friendliness, that 't is his purpose to have some other finish it."

"Oh, no, not that!" cried the goldsmith, starting up like one bitten by a serpent. "My chalice is my own, even as the office at the Mint is the Pope's. His Holiness hath no right to do more than bid me return the five hundred crowns paid to me in advance, and I will dispose of my work as may seem good to me."

"Beware, my master," said Pompeo; "imprisonment may be the sequel of your refusal."

"Signore Pompeo, your 're an ass!" retorted Benvenuto.

Pompeo left the shop in a rage.

On the following day two of the Holy Father's chamberlains called upon Bevenuto Cellini.

"The Pope has sent us," said one of them, "either to receive the chalice at your hands, or to take you to prison."

"Monsignori," rejoined Benvenuto, "an artist like myself deserved no less than to be given in charge to functionaries like yourselves. Here I am; take me to prison. But I give you fair warning that all this will not put the Pope's chalice forward one stroke of the graver."

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Benvenuto went with them to the governor of the prison, who, having doubtless received his instructions in advance, invited him to dine with him. Throughout the repast the governor used every conceivable argument to induce Benvenuto to satisfy the Pope by carrying the chalice to him, assuring him that, if he would make that concession, Clement VII., violent and obstinate as he was, would forget his displeasure. But the artist replied that he had already shown the Holy Father his chalice six times since he began it, and that that was all that could justly be required of him; moreover, he said he knew his Holiness, and that he was not to be trusted; that he might very well, when he had the chalice in his hands, take it from him altogether, and give it to some idiot to finish, who would spoil it. He reiterated his readiness to return the five hundred crowns paid in advance.

Having said so much, Benvenuto met all subsequent arguments of the governor by exalting his cook to the skies, and praising his wines.

After dinner, all his compatriots, all his dearest friends, all his apprentices, led by Ascanio, called upon him to implore him not to rush headlong to destruction by resisting the commands of Clement VII.; but Benvenuto told them that he had long desired to establish the great truth that a goldsmith can be more obstinate than a Pope; and as the most favorable opportunity he could ask for was now at hand, he certainly would not let it pass, for fear that it might not return.

His compatriots withdrew, shrugging their shoulders, his friends vowing that he was mad, and Ascanio weeping bitterly.

Fortunately Pompeo did not forget Cellini, and meanwhile he was saying slyly to the Pope, —

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"Most Holy Father, give your servant a free hand; I will send word to this obstinate fellow that, since he is so determined, he may send me the five hundred crowns; as he is a notorious spendthrift he will not have that sum at his disposal, and will be compelled to give up the chalice to me."

Clement considered this an excellent device, and bade Pompeo do as he suggested. And so, that same evening, as Cellini was about to be taken to the cell assigned him, a chamberlain made his appearance, and informed the goldsmith that his Holiness accepted his ultimatum, and demanded the delivery of the chalice or the five hundred crowns without delay.

Benvenuto replied that they had but to take him to his workshop, and he would give them the five hundred crowns.

He was escorted thither by four Swiss, accompanied by the chamberlain. He entered his bedroom, drew a key from his pocket, opened a small iron closet built into the wall, plunged his hand into a large bag, took out five hundred crowns, and, having given them to the chamberlain, showed him and the four Swiss the door. It should be said, in justice to Benvenuto Cellini, that they received four crowns for their trouble, and in justice to the Swiss, that they kissed his hands as they took their leave.

The chamberlain returned forthwith to the Holy Father, and delivered the five hundred crowns, whereupon his Holiness, in his desperation, flew into a violent rage, and began to abuse Pompeo.

"Go thyself to my great engraver at his workshop, animal," he said, "employ all the soothing arguments of which thy ignorant folly is capable, and say to him that if he will consent to finish my chalice, I will give him whatever facilities he may require."

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"But, your Holiness," said Pompeo, "will it not be time to-morrow morning?"

"I fear lest it be already too late this evening, imbecile, and I do not choose that Benvenuto shall sleep upon his wrath; therefore do my bidding on the instant, and let me not fail to have a favorable reply to-morrow morning at my levée."

Pompeo thereupon left the Vatican with drooping feathers, and repaired to Benvenuto's workshop; it was closed.

He peered through the key-hole and through the cracks in the door, and scrutinized all the windows, one after another, to see if there was not one which showed a light; but all were dark. He ventured to knock a second time somewhat louder than at first, and then a third time, still louder.

Thereupon a window on the first floor opened, and Benvenuto appeared in his shirt, arquebus in hand.

"Who 's there?" he demanded.

"I," the messenger replied.

"Who art thou?" rejoined the goldsmith, although he recognized his man at once.

"Pompeo."

"Thou liest," said Benvenuto; "I know Pompeo well, and he is far too great a coward to venture out into the streets of Rome at this hour."

"But, my dear Cellini, I swear —"

"Hold thy peace! thou art a villain, and hast taken the poor devil's name to induce me to open my door, and then to rob me."

"Master Benvenuto, may I die —"

"Say but another word," cried Benvenuto, pointing the arquebus toward his interlocutor, "and that wish of thine will be gratified."

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Pompeo fled at full speed, crying "Murder!" and disappeared around the corner of the nearest street.

Benvenuto thereupon closed his window, hung his arquebus on its nail, and went to bed once more, laughing in his beard at poor Pompeo's fright.

The next morning, as he went down to his shop, which had been opened an hour earlier by his apprentices, he spied Pompeo on the opposite side of the street, where he had been doing sentry duty since daybreak, waiting to see him descend.

As soon as he saw Cellini, Pompeo waved his hand to him in the most affectionately friendly way imaginable.

"Aha!" said Cellini, "is it you, my dear Pompeo? By my faith! I was within an ace last night of making a churl pay dearly for his insolence in assuming your name."

"Indeed!" said Pompeo, forcing himself to smile, and drawing gradually nearer to the shop; "how did it happen, pray?"

Benvenuto thereupon described the incident to his Holiness's messenger; but as his friend Benvenuto had described him in their nocturnal interview as a coward, Pompeo did not dare confess his identity with the visitor. When his tale was finished, Cellini asked Pompeo to what happy circumstance he was indebted for the honor of so early a visit from him.

Pompeo thereupon acquitted himself, but in somewhat different terms, be it understood, of the errand upon which Clement VII. had sent him to his goldsmith. Benvenuto's features expanded as he proceeded. Clement VII. yielded; *ergo* the goldsmith had been more obstinate than the Pope.

"Say to his Holiness," said Benvenuto, when the message was duly delivered, "that I shall be very happy

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to obey him, and to do anything in my power to regain his favor, which I have lost, not by any fault of my own, but through the evil machinations of envious rivals. As for yourself, Signore Pompeo, as the Pope does not lack retainers, I counsel you, in your own interest, to look to it that another than you is sent to me hereafter; for your health's sake, Signore Pompeo, interfere no more in my affairs; in pity for yourself, never happen in my path, and for the welfare of my soul, Pompeo, pray God that I be not your Cæsar."

Pompeo waited to hear no more, but returned to Clement VII. with Cellini's reply, of which, however, he suppressed the peroration.

Some time thereafter, in order to put the seal to his reconciliation with Benvenuto, Clement VII. ordered his medallion struck by him. Benvenuto struck it in bronze, in silver, and in gold, and then carried it to him. The Pope was so enraptured with it that he cried out in his admiration, that so beautiful a medallion had never been produced by the ancients.

"Ah, well, your Holiness," said Benvenuto, "had not I displayed some firmness, we should have been at enmity to-day; for I would never have forgiven you, and you would have lost a devoted servant. Look you, Holy Father," he continued, by way of good counsel, "your Holiness would not do ill to remember now and then the opinion of many discreet folk, that one should bleed seven times before cutting once, and you would do well also to allow yourself to be something less easily made the dupe of lying tongues and envious detractors; so much for your guidance in future, and we will say no more about it, Most Holy Father."

Thus did Benvenuto pardon Clement VII., which he certainly would not have done had he loved him less;

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but, as his compatriot, he was deeply attached to him. Great, therefore, was his sorrow when the Pope suddenly died, a few months subsequent to the episode we have described. The man of iron burst into tears at the news, and for a week he wept like a child. The Pontiff's demise was doubly calamitous to poor Cellini. On the very day of his burial he met Pompeo, whom he had not seen since the day when he bade him spare him the too frequent infliction of his presence.

It should be said that since Cellini's dire threats, the unhappy Pompeo had not dared to go out unless accompanied by a dozen men, well armed, to whom he gave the same pay that the Pope gave his Swiss Guards; so that every walk that he took in the city cost him two or three crowns. And even when surrounded by his twelve sbirri, he trembled at the thought of meeting Benvenuto Cellini, for he knew that if the meeting should result in an affray, and any mishap should befall the goldsmith, the Pope, who was really very fond of him, would make him, Pompeo, pay dearly for it. But, as we have said, Clement VII. was dead, and his death restored some little courage to Pompeo.

Benvenuto had been to St. Peter's to kiss the feet of the deceased Pontiff, and was returning through the street Dei Banchi, accompanied by Pagolo and Ascanio, when he found himself face to face with Pompeo and his twelve men. At the sight of his enemy, Pompeo became very pale; but as he looked around and saw how amply provided he was with defenders, while Benvenuto had only two boys with him, he took heart of grace, halted, and nodded his head mockingly, while he toyed with the hilt of his dagger with his right hand.

At sight of this group of men by whom his master was threatened, Ascanio put his hand to his sword,

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while Pagolo pretended to be looking in another direction; but Benvenuto did not choose to expose his beloved pupil to so unequal a conflict. He laid his hand upon Ascanio's, pushing the half-drawn blade back into the scabbard, and walked on as if he had seen nothing, or as if he had taken no offence at what he saw. Ascanio could hardly recognize his master in such guise, but as his master withdrew, he withdrew with him.

Pompeo triumphantly made a deep salutation to Benvenuto, and pursued his way, still surrounded by his sbirri, who imitated his bravado.

Benvenuto bit his lips till the blood came, while externally his features wore a smile. His behavior was inexplicable to any one who knew the irascible nature of the illustrious goldsmith.

But they had not proceeded a hundred yards when he stopped before the workshop of one of his confrères, and went in, alleging as a pretext his desire to see an antique vase which had recently been found in the Etruscan tombs of Corneto. He bade his pupils go on to the shop, and promised to join them there in a few moments.

As the reader will understand, this was only a pretext to get Ascanio out of the way, for as soon as he thought that the young man and his companion, concerning whom he was less anxious because he was sure that such courage as he possessed would not carry him too far, had turned the corner of the street, he replaced the vase upon the shelf from which he took it, and darted out of the shop.

With three strides Benvenuto was in the street where he had met Pompeo; but Pompeo was no longer there. Luckily, or rather unluckily, this man, encompassed

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by his twelve sbirri, was a noticeable object, and so when Benvenuto inquired as to the direction he had taken, the first person to whom he applied was able to give him the information, and like a bloodhound that has recovered a lost scent Benvenuto started in pursuit.

Pompeo had stopped at a druggist's door, at the corner of the Chiavica, and was vaunting to the worthy compounder of drugs the prowess he had shown in his meeting with Benvenuto Cellini, when his eye suddenly fell upon the latter turning the corner of the street, with fire in his eye, and the perspiration streaming down his forehead.

Benvenuto shouted exultantly as he caught sight of him, and Pompeo stopped short in the middle of his sentence. It was evident that something terrible was about to happen. The bravos formed a group around Pompeo and drew their swords.

It was an insane performance for one man to attack thirteen, but Benvenuto was, as we have said, one of those leonine creatures who do not count their enemies. Against the thirteen swords which threatened him, he drew a small keen-edged dagger which he always wore in his girdle, and rushed into the centre of the group, sweeping aside two or three swords with one arm, overturning two or three men with the other, until he made his way to where Pompeo stood, and seized him by the collar. But the group at once closed upon him.

Thereupon naught could be seen save a confused struggling mass, whence issued loud shouts, and above which swords were waving. For a moment the living mass rolled on the ground, in shapeless, inextricable confusion, then a man sprang to his feet with a shout of triumph, and with a mighty effort, forced his way out of the group as he made his way in, bleeding

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himself, but triumphantly waving his blood-stained dagger. It was Benvenuto Cellini.

Another man remained upon the pavement, writhing in the agony of death. He had received two blows from the dagger, one below the ear, the other at the base of the neck behind the collar bone. In a few seconds he breathed his last, — it was Pompeo.

Any other than Benvenuto, after such a deed, would have taken himself off at full speed, but he passed his dagger to his left hand, drew his sword, and resolutely awaited the sbirri.

But the sbirri had no further business with Benvenuto; he who paid them was dead, and consequently could pay them no more. They ran off like a flock of frightened rabbits, leaving Pompeo's body where it lay.

At that juncture Ascanio appeared, and rushed into his master's arms; he was not deceived by the ruse of the Etruscan vase, but although he had made all possible speed he arrived a few seconds too late.

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III.

DÆDALUS.

BENVENUTO returned to his abode with Ascanio, somewhat ill at ease, not because of the three wounds he had received, which were all too slight to occasion him any anxiety, but because of the possible results of the affray. Six months before, he had killed Guasconti, his brother's murderer, but had come off scot free by virtue of the protection of Pope Clement VII.; moreover, that act was committed by way of reprisal, but now Benvenuto's protector had gone the way of all flesh, and the prospect was much more ominous.

Remorse, be it understood, did not disturb him for one moment. But we beg our readers not for that reason to form an unfavorable opinion of our worthy goldsmith, who after killing a man, after killing two men perhaps, — indeed, if we search his past very carefully, after killing three men, — although he had a wholesome dread of the watch, did not for one instant fear to meet his God.

For this man, in the year of grace 1540, was an ordinary man, an every-day man, as the Germans say. Men thought so little of dying in those days, that they naturally came to think very little of killing; we are brave to-day, but the men of those days were foolhardy; we are men grown, they were hot-headed youths. Life was so abundant in those days that men lost it, gave

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it, sold it, nay, even took it, with absolute indifference and recklessness.

There was once an author who was calumniated and abused for many years, whose name was made a synonym for treachery, cruelty, and all the words which mean infamy, and it needed this nineteenth century, the most impartial since the birth of humanity, to rehabilitate that author as the grand patriot and noble-hearted man he was. And yet Nicolo Machiavelli's only crime was that he lived at an epoch when brute strength and success were all in all; when folk judged by deeds, not words, and when such men as Cesar Borgia the sovereign, Machiavelli the thinker, and Benvenuto Cellini the artisan, marched straight to their goal, without thought of methods or reasons.

One day a body was found in the public square of Cesena, cut in four pieces; it was the body of Ramiro d' Orco. Now, as Ramiro d' Orco was a considerable personage in Italy, the Florentine Republic sought to ascertain the causes of his death. The Eight of the Signoria therefore wrote to Machiavelli, their ambassador at Cesena, to satisfy their curiosity.

But Machiavelli made no other reply than this: —

"MAGNIFICENT SIGNORIA: — I have naught to say anent the death of Ramiro d' Orco, save this: that no prince in the world is so skilful as Cesar Borgia in the art of making and unmaking men according to their deserts.

"MACHIAVELLI."

Benvenuto was an exponent of the theory enunciated by the illustrious secretary of the Florentine Republic. Benvenuto the genius, Cesar Borgia the prince, both considered themselves above the laws by virtue of their power. In their eyes the distinction between what was

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just and what was unjust was identical with the distinction between what they could and what they could not do; of right and duty they had not the slightest conception. A man stood in their path, they suppressed the man. To-day civilization does him the honor of purchasing him.

But in those old days the blood was boiling so abundantly in the veins of the young nations that they shed it for their health's sake.

They fought by instinct, not for their country to any great extent, not for women to any great extent, but largely for the sake of fighting, nation against nation, man against man. Benvenuto made war upon Pompeo as François I. did upon Charles V. France and Spain fought an intermittent duel, now at Marignano, and again at Pavia; all as if it were the most natural thing in the world, without preamble, without long harangues, without lamentation.

In the same way genius was exercised by those who possessed it as an innate faculty, as an absolute royal power, based upon divine right: art in the sixteenth century was looked upon as the natural birthright of man.

We must not therefore wonder at these men who wondered at nothing; we have, to explain their homicides, their whims, and their faults, an expression which explains and justifies everything in our country, especially in these days of ours: —

That was the fashion.

Benvenuto therefore did simply what it was the fashion to do; Pompeo annoyed Benvenuto Cellini, and Benvenuto suppressed Pompeo.

But the police occasionally investigated these acts of suppression; they were very careful not to protect a

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man when he was alive, but perhaps once in ten times they showed a feeble desire to avenge him when he was dead.

They experienced such a desire in the matter of Pompeo and Benvenuto Cellini. As the goldsmith, having returned to his shop, was putting certain papers in the fire, and some money in his pocket, he was arrested by the pontifical sbirri, and taken to the castle of San Angelo, — an occurrence for which he was almost consoled by the reflection that the castle of San Angelo was where noblemen were imprisoned.

But another thought that was no less efficacious in bringing consolation to Cellini as he entered the castle was this, — that a man endowed with so inventive a mind as his need not long delay about leaving it, in one way or another. And so, when he was taken before the governor, who was sitting at a table covered with a green cloth, and looking through a great pile of papers, he said: —

"Sir Governor, multiply your locks and bolts and sentinels threefold; confine me in your highest cell or in your deepest dungeon; keep close watch upon me all day, and lie awake all night; and yet I warn you that, despite all that, I will escape."

The governor looked up at the prisoner who addressed him with such unheard of assurance, and recognized Benvenuto Cellini, whom he had had the honor of entertaining three months before.

Notwithstanding his acquaintance with the man, perhaps because of it, Benvenuto's allocution caused the worthy governor the most profound dismay. He was a Florentine, one Master Georgio, a knight of the Ugolini, and an excellent man, but somewhat weak in the head. However, he soon recovered from his first

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surprise, and ordered Benvenuto to be taken to the highest cell in the castle. The platform was immediately above it; a sentinel was stationed on the platform, and another sentinel at the foot of the wall.

The governor called the prisoner's attention to these details, and when he thought that he had had time to digest them, he said: —

"My dear Benvenuto, one may open locks, force doors, dig out from an underground dungeon, make a hole through a wall, bribe sentinels and put jailers to sleep; but without wings one cannot descend to earth from this height."

"I will do it, nevertheless," said Cellini.

The governor looked him in the eye, and began to think that his prisoner was mad.

"Why, in that case, you propose to fly?"

"Why not? I have always believed that man can fly, but I have lacked time to make the experiment. Here I shall have time enough, and, pardieu! I mean to solve the problem. The adventure of Dædalus is history, not fable."

"Beware the sun, dear Benvenuto," sneeringly replied the governor; "beware the sun"

"I will fly away by night," said Benvenuto.

The governor was not expecting that reply, so that he had no suitable repartee at hand, and withdrew in a rage.

In good sooth it was most important that Benvenuto should make his escape, at any price. At another time he would not have been at all perturbed because he had killed a man, and would have been quit of all responsibility by following the procession of the Virgin in August, clad in a doublet and cloak of blue armoisin. But the new Pope, Paul III., was vindictive to the

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last degree, and when he was still Monsignore Farnese, Benvenuto had had a crow to pluck with him, apropos of a vase which the goldsmith refused to deliver until paid for, and which his Eminence sought to procure by force, the result being to subject Benvenuto to the dire necessity of using his Eminence's retainers somewhat roughly. Moreover, the Holy Father was jealous because King François I. had commanded Monseigneur de Montluc, his ambassador to the Holy See, to request that Benvenuto be sent to France. When he was informed of Benvenuto's imprisonment, Monseigneur de Montluc urged the request more strenuously than before, thinking thereby to render the unfortunate prisoner a service; but he was entirely unfamiliar with the character of the new Pope, who was even more obstinate than his predecessor, Clement VII. Now Paul III. had sworn that Benvenuto should pay dearly for his escapade, and if he was not precisely in danger of death, — a pope would have thought twice in those days before ordering such an artist to the gallows, — he was in great danger of being forgotten in his prison. It was therefore of the utmost importance that Benvenuto should not forget himself, and that was why he was determined to take flight without awaiting the interrogatories and judgment, which might never have arrived; for the Pope, angered by the intervention of François I., refused even to hear Benvenuto Cellini's name mentioned. The prisoner knew all this from Ascanio, who was managing his establishment, and who, by dint of persistent entreaties, had obtained permission to visit his master. Their interviews, of course, were held through two iron gratings, and in presence of witnesses watching to see that the pupil passed neither file, nor rope, nor knife to his master.

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As soon as the door of his cell was locked behind the governor, Benvenuto set about inspecting his surroundings.

The following articles were contained within the four walls of his new abiding place: a bed, a fireplace, a table, and two chairs. Two days after his installation there, he obtained a supply of clay and a modelling tool. The governor at first declined to allow him to have these means of distraction, but he changed his mind upon reflecting that, if the artist's mind were thus employed, he might perhaps abandon the idea of escape, to which he clung so tenaciously. The same day, Benvenuto sketched a colossal Venus.

All this of itself was no great matter; but in conjunction with imagination, patience, and energy, it was much.

On a certain very cold day in December, when the fire was lighted on the hearth, the servant changed the sheets on his bed and left the soiled ones upon a chair. As soon as the door was closed, Benvenuto made one bound from the chair on which he was sitting to the bed, took out of the mattress two enormous handfuls of the maize leaves which are used to stuff mattresses in Italy, stowed the sheets away in their place, returned to his statue, took up his tool and resumed his work. At that moment the servant returned for the forgotten sheets, and after looking everywhere for them, asked Benvenuto if he had not seen them. But he replied carelessly, as if absorbed by his work, that some of his fellows doubtless had taken them, or that he carried them away himself without knowing it. The servant had no suspicion of the truth, so little time had elapsed since he left the room, and Benvenuto played his part so naturally; and as the sheets were never found, he

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was very careful to say nothing, for fear of being obliged to pay for them or of losing his employment.

One who has never lived through some supreme crisis can form no idea of the possibilities of such a time in the way of terrible catastrophes and poignant anguish. The most trivial accidents of life arouse in us joy or despair. As soon as the servant left the room, Benvenuto fell upon his knees, and thanked God for the help He had sent him.

As his bed was never touched until the next morning after it was once made, he quietly left the sheets in the mattress.

When the night came he began to cut the sheets, which luckily were new and strong, in strips three or four inches wide, then tied them together as securely as he could; lastly, he cut open his statue, which was of clay, hollowed it out, placed his treasure in the cavity, then spread clay over the wound, and smoothed it off with his finger and his modelling tool, until the most skilful artist could not have discovered that poor Venus had been made to undergo the Cæsarean operation.

The next morning the governor entered the prisoner's cell unexpectedly, as he was accustomed to do, but found him as usual calm and hard at work. Every morning the poor man, who had been specially threatened for the night, trembled lest he should find the cell empty; and it should be said, in justice to his frankness, that he did not conceal his joy every morning when he found it occupied.

"I confess that you make me terribly anxious, Benvenuto," said the poor man; "however, I begin to think that your threats of escape amount to nothing."

"I don't threaten you, Master Georgio," rejoined Benvenuto, "I warn you."

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"Do you still hope to fly away?"

"Luckily it is n't a mere hope, but downright certainty, pardieu!"

"Demonio! how will you do it?" cried the poor governor, dismayed beyond measure by Benvenuto's real or pretended confidence in his means of escape.

"That 's my secret, master. But I give you fair warning that my wings are growing."

The governor instinctively turned his eye upon the prisoner's shoulders.

"'T is thus," continued Benvenuto, working away at his statue, and rounding the hips in such fashion that one would have thought he proposed to rival the Venus Callipyge. "Betwixt us there is a duel impending. You have on your side enormous towers, thick doors, strong bolts, innumerable keepers always on the alert; I have on my side my brain, and these poor hands, and I warn you very frankly that you will be beaten. But as you are a very clever man, as you have taken every possible precaution, you will at least, when I am gone, have the consolation of knowing that it is through no fault of yours, Master Georgio, that you have no occasion to reproach yourself at all, Master Georgio, and that you neglected nothing that could help you to detain me, Master Georgio. And now what say you to this hip, for you are a lover of art, I know."

Such unblushing assurance enraged the unhappy official. His prisoner had become his fixed idea, upon which all his faculties were centred. He grew melancholy, lost his appetite, and started constantly, like one suddenly aroused from sleep. One night Benvenuto heard a great noise upon the platform; then it was transferred to his corridor, and finally stopped at his door. The door opened, and he saw Master Georgio,

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in dressing-gown and nightcap, attended by four jailers and eight guards. The governor rushed to his bedside with distorted features. Benvenuto sat up in bed and laughed in his face. The governor, without taking offence at his hilarity, breathed like a diver returning to the surface.

"Ah! God be praised!" he cried; "he is still here! There 's much good sense in the saying, *Songe — mensonge*" (Dream — lie).

"In God's name, what 's the matter?" demanded Benvenuto, "and what happy circumstance affords me the pleasure of a visit from you at such an hour, Master Georgio?"

"Jésus Dieu! it 's nothing at all, and I am quit of it this time for the fright. Did I not dream that your accursed wings had grown, — huge wings, whereon you tranquilly hovered above the castle of San Angelo, saying, 'Adieu, my dear governor, adieu! I did not wish to go away without taking leave of you. I go; I pray that I may be so blessed as never to see you more.'"

"What! did I say that to you, Master Georgio?"

"Those were your very words. Ah, Benvenuto, you are a sorry guest for me!"

"Oh! I trust that you do not deem me so ill-bred as that. Happily it was but a dream; for otherwise I would not forgive you."

"Happily it is not true. I hold you fast, my dear friend, and although truth compels me to say that your society is not of the most agreeable to me, I hope to hold you for a long time yet to come."

"I do not think it," retorted Benvenuto, with the confident smile which caused his host to use strong language.

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The governor went out, cursing Benvenuto roundly, and the next morning he issued orders that his cell should be inspected every two hours, night and day. This rigid inspection was continued for a month; but at the end of that time, as there was no apparent reason to believe that Benvenuto was even thinking of escape, the vigilance of his keepers was somewhat relaxed.

Benvenuto, however, had employed the month in accomplishing a terrible task.

As we have said, he minutely examined his cell immediately after he was first consigned to it, and from that moment his mind was made up as to the manner of his escape. His window was barred, and the bars were too strong to be removed with the hand or with his modelling tool, the only iron instrument he possessed. The chimney narrowed so toward the top that the prisoner must needs have had the fairy Melusine's power of transforming herself into a serpent to pass through it.

The door remained. Ah, the door! Let us see how the door was made.

It was a heavy oaken door two fingers thick, secured by two locks and four bolts, and sheathed on the inside with iron plates kept in place by nails at the top and bottom. It was through that door that the escape must be effected.

Benvenuto had noticed in the corridor, a few steps from the door, the stairway leading to the platform. At intervals of two hours he heard the footsteps of the relieving sentinel going up, then the steps of the other coming down; after which he would hear nothing more for another two hours.

The question for him to solve, then, was simply this: how to reach the other side of that door, which was

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secured by two locks and four bolts, and furthermore sheathed on the inside with iron plates kept in place by nails at the top and bottom. The solution of this problem was the task to which Benvenuto had devoted the month in question.

With his modelling tool, which was of iron, he removed, one by one, the heads of all the nails, save four above and four below, which he left until the last day: then, in order that his work might not be detected, he replaced the missing heads with exactly similar ones, modelled in clay and covered with iron filings, so that it was impossible for the keenest eye to distinguish the false from the true. As there were, at top and bottom together, some sixty nails, and as it took at least one hour, and sometimes two, to decapitate each nail, the magnitude of the task may be understood.

Every evening, when everybody had retired, and nothing could be heard save the footsteps of the sentinel walking back and forth over his head, he built a great fire on the hearth, and piled glowing embers against the iron plates on his door; the iron became red hot, and gradually transformed to charcoal the wood upon which it was applied; but no indication of the carbonizing process appeared on the other side of the door.

For a whole month Benvenuto devoted himself to this task, as we have said; but at the end of the month it was finished, and he only awaited a favorable opportunity to make his escape. He was compelled, however, to wait a few days, for the moon was near the full when the work was done.

There was nothing more to be done to the nails, so Benvenuto continued to char the door, and drive the governor to desperation. That very day the functionary entered his cell more preoccupied than ever.

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"My dear prisoner," said the worthy man, whose mind constantly recurred to his fixed idea, "do you still propose to fly away? Come, tell me frankly."

"More than ever, my dear host," replied Benvenuto.

"Look you," said the governor, "you may say what you choose, but upon my word, I believe it's impossible."

"Impossible, Master Georgio, impossible!" rejoined the artist; "why, you know full well that that word does not exist for me, who have always exerted myself to do those things which are the most impossible for other men, and that with success. Impossible, my dear host! Why, have I not sometimes amused myself by making nature jealous, by fashioning with gold and emeralds and diamonds a flower fairer far than all the flowers that the dew empearls? Think you that he who can make flowers can not make wings?"

"May God help me!" said the governor; "with your insolent assurance you'll make me lose my wits! But tell me, in order that these wings may sustain your weight in the air, — a thing which seems impossible to me, I confess, — what form shall you give them?"

"I have thought deeply thereupon, as you may well imagine, since my safety depends entirely upon the shape of my wings."

"With what result?"

"After examining all flying things, I have concluded that, if I wish to reproduce by art what they have received from God, I can copy the bat most successfully."

"But when all is said, Benvenuto," continued the governor, "even if you had the materials with which to make a pair of wings, would not your courage fail you when the time came to use them?"

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"Give me what I need for their construction, my dear governor, and I 'll reply by flying away."

"What do you need, in God's name?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! almost nothing; a little forge, an anvil, files, tongs and pincers to make the springs, and twenty yards of oiled silk for the membranes.

"Good! very good!" said Master Georgio; "that reassures me somewhat, for, clever as you may be, you never will succeed in obtaining all those things here."

"'T is done," rejoined Benvenuto.

The governor leaped from his chair; but he instantly reflected that it was a material impossibility. And yet, for all that, his poor brain had not a moment's respite. Every bird that flew by his window he imagined to be Benvenuto Cellini, so great is the influence of a master mind over one of moderate capacity.

The same day Master Georgio sent for the most skilful machinist in all Rome, and ordered him to measure him for a pair of bat's wings.

The machinist stared at the governor in blank amazement, without replying, thinking, with some reason, that Master Georgio had gone mad.

But as Master Georgio insisted, as Master Georgio was wealthy, and as Master Georgio had the wherewithal to pay for insane freaks, if he chose to indulge in them, the machinist set about the task, and a week later brought him a pair of magnificent wings, fitted to an iron waist to be worn upon the body, and worked by means of an extremely ingenious arrangement of springs, with most encouraging regularity.

Master Georgio paid his man the stipulated price, measured the space required to accommodate the apparatus, went up to Benvenuto's cell, and without a word overturned everything therein, looking under the bed,

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peering up the chimney, fumbling in the mattress, and leaving not the smallest corner unvisited.

Then he went out, still without speaking, convinced that, unless Benvenuto was a sorcerer, no pair of wings similar to his own could be hidden in his cell.

It was clear that the unhappy governor's brain was becoming more and more disordered.

Upon descending to his own quarters, Master Georgio found the machinist waiting for him; he had returned to call his attention to the fact that there was an iron ring at the end of each wing, intended to support the legs of a man flying in a horizontal position.

The machinist had no sooner left him than Master Georgio locked himself in, donned the iron waist, unfolded his wings, hung up his legs, and, lying flat upon his stomach, made his first attempt at flying.

But, try as he would, he could not succeed in rising above the floor.

After two or three trials, always with the same result, he sent for the mechanic once more.

"Master," said he, "I have tried your wings, but they won't work."

"How did you try them?"

Master Georgio described his repeated experiments in detail. The mechanic listened with a sober face, and said, when he had concluded: —

"I am not surprised; as you lay on the floor, you had n't a sufficient quantity of air under your wings. You must go to the top of the castle of San Angelo, and boldly launch yourself into space."

"And you think that in that way I can fly?"

"I am sure of it."

"If you are so sure of it, would it not be as well to make the experiment yourself?"

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"The wings are proportioned to the weight of your body and not of mine," replied the machinist. "Wings to carry my weight would need to measure a foot and a half more from tip to tip."

And with that he bowed and took his leave.

"The devil!" exclaimed Master Georgio.

Throughout that day Master Georgio indulged in various vagaries, which tended to prove that his reason, like Roland's, was penetrating farther and farther into imaginary realms.

In the evening, just at bedtime, he summoned all the servants, all the jailers, all the guards.

"If," said he, "you learn that Benvenuto Cellini is intending to fly away, let him go, and notify me, nothing more; for I shall know where to go to capture him, even in the dark, since I am myself a veritable bat, while he, whatever he may say, is only a false bat."

The poor governor was quite mad; but as they hoped that a night's rest would have a soothing effect upon him, they decided to wait until morning before advising the Pope.

Moreover it was an abominable night, dark and rainy, and no one cared to go out in such weather; always excepting Benvenuto Cellini, who had selected that very night for his escape, in a spirit of contrariety doubtless.

And so, as soon as he heard the clock strike ten, and the footsteps indicating that the sentinel had been relieved, he fell on his knees and offered a fervent prayer, after which he set to work.

In the first place he removed the heads of the four nails, which alone held the iron plates in place. The last yielded to his efforts just at midnight.

He heard the steps of the sentinel going up to the

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platform; he stood with his ear glued to the door, without breathing, until the relieved sentinel came down, the steps died away in the distance, and silence reigned once more.

The rain fell with redoubled force, and Benvenuto's heart leaped for joy as he heard it beating against the window.

He at once tried to remove the iron plates; as there was nothing to hold them, they yielded to his efforts, and he placed them, one by one, against the wall.

He then lay flat upon the floor, and attacked the bottom of the door with his modelling tool, sharpened like a dagger, and fitted to a wooden handle. The oak was entirely changed to carbon, and gave way at the first touch.

In an instant Benvenuto had made an aperture at the bottom of the door sufficiently large to allow him to crawl through it. He reopened the belly of his statue, took out the strips of linen, coiled them around his waist like a girdle, armed himself with his modelling-tool, of which he had, as we have said, made a dagger, and fell on his knees once more and prayed.

Then he passed his head through the hole, then his shoulders, then the rest of his body, and found himself in the corridor.

He stood erect; but his legs trembled so that he was compelled to lean against the wall for support. His heart was beating as if it would burst, and his head was on fire. A drop of perspiration trembled at the end of each hair, and he clutched the handle of his dagger in his hand, as if some one were trying to tear it away from him.

However, as everything was quiet, as nothing was stirring and not a sound was to be heard, Benvenuto

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soon recovered himself, and felt his way along the wall of the corridor with his hand, until the wall came to an end. Then he put out his foot and felt the first step of the staircase, or, more properly speaking, the ladder, which led to the platform.

He mounted the rungs, one by one, shivering as the wood creaked under his feet, until he felt a breath of air; then the rain beat against his face as his head rose above the level of the platform, and as he had been in most intense darkness for a quarter of an hour, he was able to judge at once what reason he had to fear or hope.

The balance seemed to incline toward hope.

The sentinel had taken refuge from the storm in his sentry-box. Now, as the sentinels who mounted guard upon the castle of San Angelo were stationed there, not to inspect the platform, but to look down into the moat and survey the surrounding country, the closed side of the sentry-box faced the top of the ladder by which Benvenuto ascended.

The artist crept cautiously on his hands and knees toward that part of the platform which was farthest removed from the sentry-box. There he securely fastened one end of his improvised rope to a jutting projection some six inches in length, and then knelt for the third time.

"O Lord!" he muttered, "O Lord! do Thou help me, since I am seeking to help myself."

With that prayer upon his lips, he let himself down by his hands, heedless of the bruises upon his knees and his forehead, which, from time to time, rubbed against the face of the wall, and at last reached the solid earth

When he felt the ground beneath his feet, his breast

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swelled with an infinitude of joy and pride. He contemplated the immense height from which he had descended, and could not avoid saying in an undertone, "Free at last!" But his joy was short-lived.

As he turned away from the tower, his knees trembled under him; directly in front of him rose a wall recently built, and of which he knew nothing; he was lost.

Everything seemed to give way within him, and in his despair he fell to the ground; but as he fell, his foot struck against something hard, — it was a long beam; he gave a slight exclamation of surprise and delight; he was saved.

Ah! no one knows what heart-rending alternations of joy and hope one short minute of life can contain.

Benvenuto seized the beam as a shipwrecked sailor seizes the spar which may save him from drowning. Under ordinary circumstances two strong men would have found difficulty in lifting it; he dragged it to the wall, and stood it on end against it. Then he climbed to the top of the wall, clinging to the beam with his hands and knees, but when he arrived there his strength was insufficient to raise the beam and lower it on the other side.

For a moment his head swam; he closed his eyes, and it seemed as if he were struggling in a lake of flames.

Suddenly he remembered his strips of linen, by means of which he had descended from the platform.

He slid down the beam to the ground once more, and ran to the spot where he had left them hanging; but he had fastened them so securely at the opposite end, that he could not detach them. In his desperation he raised himself from the ground by hanging to them, pulling with all his strength, and hoping to break them. Fortunately one of the knots slipped at last, and Benvenuto

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fell to the ground, grasping a fragment some twelve feet long.

This was all that he needed; he rose with a bound, and, filled with fresh vigor, climbed up to the top of the wall once more, fastened the cord to the end of the beam, and slid down on the other side.

When he reached the end of the cord he felt in vain for the ground with his feet, and, upon looking over his shoulder, saw that it was still some six feet away. He let go the cord, and dropped.

He lay still for an instant; he was completely exhausted, and there was no skin left upon his legs and hands. For some moments he gazed stupidly at his bleeding flesh; but five o'clock struck, and he saw that the stars were beginning to pale.

He rose; but as he rose, a sentinel whom he had not noticed, but who had undoubtedly witnessed his performance, walked toward him. Benvenuto saw that he was lost, and that he must either kill or be killed. He drew his modelling tool from his belt, and marched straight toward the guard, with such a determined expression that that worthy doubtless realized that he had not only a powerful man, but a deathly despair, to contend with. Benvenuto was determined not to give ground, but suddenly the soldier turned his back upon him as if he had not seen him. The prisoner understood what that meant.

He ran to the last rampart, and found himself some twelve or fifteen feet above the moat. Such a trifle was not likely to stop a man like Benvenuto Cellini, in his present predicament, when he had left part of his cord hanging from the top of the tower, and the other part attached to the beam, so that he had nothing left with which to lower himself, and there was no time to lose.

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He hung by his hands from a ring in the masonry, and, with a mental prayer, let himself drop.

This time he fainted outright.

An hour passed before he came to himself; but the coolness which is always noticeable in the air as dawn approaches, revived him. He lay for an instant with his mind in confusion, then passed his hand over his forehead and remembered everything.

He felt a sharp pain in his head, and saw blood upon the stones where he lay, which had trickled down from his face. He put his hand to his forehead a second time, not to collect his thoughts, but to investigate his wounds, which he found were but skin deep. He smiled and tried to stand up, but fell heavily back; his right leg was broken three inches above the ankle. The leg was so benumbed that at first he felt no pain.

He at once removed his shirt and tore it into strips, then put the ends of the bone together as well as he could, and applied the bandage, binding it with all his strength, and passing it under the sole of his foot now and then, in order to keep the bones in place.

Then he dragged himself on all fours toward one of the city gates which was within five hundred yards. After half an hour of atrocious suffering, he reached the gate only to find that it was closed. But he noticed a large stone under the gate, which yielded to his first attempt to remove it, and he passed through the hole left by it.

He had not taken twenty steps beyond the gate when he was attacked by a pack of famished dogs, who were attracted by the odor of blood. He drew his modelling tool, and despatched the largest and most savage with a blow in the side. The others immediately threw themselves upon their defunct comrade and devoured him.

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Benvenuto dragged himself along to the church of La Transpontina, where he fell in with a water-carrier who had just filled his jars and loaded his donkey. He called him.

"Look you," he said; "I was with my mistress; circumstances compelled me, although I went in at the door, to come out through the window. I leaped from the first floor, and broke my leg; carry me to the steps of Saint Peter's, and I will give you a golden crown.

The water-carrier, without a word, took the wounded man on his shoulder, and carried him to the designated spot. Having received his pay, he went his way without so much as looking behind.

Thereupon Benvenuto, still on all fours, made his way to the palace of Monseigneur de Montluc, the French Ambassador, who lived only a few steps away.

Monseigneur de Montluc exerted himself so zealously in his behalf, that at the end of a month Benvenuto was cured, at the end of two months he was pardoned, and at the end of four months he started for France with Ascanio and Pagolo.

The poor governor, who had gone mad, lived and died a madman, constantly imagining that he was a bat, and making the most violent efforts to fly.

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IV.

SCOZZONE.

When Benvenuto Cellini arrived in France, François I. was at the château of Fontainebleau with his whole court. The artist stopped in the town, sending word of his arrival to the Cardinal of Ferrara. The cardinal, who knew that the king was impatiently awaiting his coming, at once transmitted the intelligence to his Majesty. Benvenuto was received by the king the same day.

"Benvenuto," he said, addressing him in that mellifluous and expressive tongue in which the artist wrote so well, "for a few days, while you are recovering from your fatigue and vexation, repose, enjoy yourself, make merry, and meanwhile we will reflect and determine upon some noble work for you to execute."

Thereupon he ordered apartments in the château to be made ready for the artist, and that he should want for nothing.

Thus Benvenuto found himself at the outset installed in the very centre of French civilization, at that time behind that of Italy, with which it was already struggling for supremacy, and which it was soon to surpass. As he looked around, he could easily believe that he had never left the Tuscan capital, for he found himself in the midst of the arts and artists he had known at Florence; Primaticcio had succeeded Leonardo da Vinci and Rosso.

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It was for Benvenuto, therefore, to show himself not unworthy of these illustrious predecessors, and to carry the art of statuary as high in the eyes of the most gallant court of Europe as those three great masters had carried the art of painting. And so Benvenuto determined to anticipate the king's wishes by not waiting for him to command the noble work promised, and to execute it himself, of his own motion, and with his own resources. He had readily discovered the king's affection for the royal residence where he had met him, and determined to flatter his preference by executing a statue to be called the "Nymph of Fontainebleau."

A lovely work to undertake was this statue, crowned at once with oak and wheat-ears and vines; for Fontainebleau is partly field, partly forest, and partly vineyard. The nymph of whom Benvenuto dreamed must therefore be reminiscent of Ceres and Diana and Erigone, — three types of marvellous beauty melted into one, and which, while retaining their distinctive characteristics, should still form but a single whole. Then there should be represented upon the pedestal the attributes of those three goddesses; and they who have seen the fascinating figures about the statue of Perseus know the Florentine master's method of executing those mavellous details.

But it was his misfortune that, although he had in his own mind his ideal of beauty, he was sadly in need of a human model for the material part of his work. Where was he to find this model, in whose single person could be found the threefold beauty of three goddesses?

Certain it is, that if, as in the olden days, the days of Apelles and Phidias, the beauties of the day, those queens of loveliness, had come of their own accord to pose for Benvenuto, he would have found what he

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sought within the precincts of the court; for there was a whole Olympus in the flower of youth and beauty. There were Catherine de Medicis, then but one and twenty; Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre, who was called the Fourth Grace and the Tenth Muse; and lastly, Madame la Duchesse d'Etampes, whom we shall meet frequently in the course of this narrative, and who was known as the loveliest of blue-stockings and the most learned of beauties. In this galaxy the artist could have found more than he needed; but the days of Apelles and Phidias had long gone by, and he must look elsewhere.

It was with great pleasure, therefore, that he learned that the court was about to set out for Paris. Unfortunately, as Benvenuto himself says, the court in those days travelled like a funeral procession. Preceded by twelve to fifteen thousand horse, halting for the night in some place where there were no more than two or three houses, wasting four hours every evening in pitching the tents, and four hours every morning in striking them, — in this way, although the distance was but sixteen leagues, five days were spent in the journey from Fontainebleau to Paris.

Twenty times on the way Benvenuto was tempted to push forward, but as often the Cardinal of Ferrara dissuaded him, saying that, if the king was compelled to pass a single day without seeing him, he would certainly ask what had become of him, and when he learned that he had left the procession would look upon his unceremonious departure as a failure of respect toward himself. So Benvenuto chafed at his bit, and tried to kill time during the long halt by sketching his nymph of Fontainebleau.

At last he arrived at Paris. His first visit was to

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Primaticcio, who was commissioned to continue the work of Leonardo da Vinci and Rosso at Fontainebleau. Primaticcio, who had lived long at Paris, should be able at once to put him upon the path he was seeking, and to tell him where to look for models.

A word, in passing, as to Primaticcio.

Il Signor Francesco Primaticcio, who was commonly called at this time Le Bologna, from his birthplace, had studied under Jules Romain for six years, and had lived eight years in France, whither François I. had summoned him upon the advice of the Marquis of Mantua, his great purveyor of artists. He was, as any one may see at Fontainebleau, a man of prodigious fecundity, with a broad, florid manner, and irreproachable regularity of outline. For a long time Primaticcio, with his encyclopedic brain, his vast store of knowledge, and his boundless talent, which embraced all varieties of painting, — for a long time, we say, he was despised, but in our day he has been avenged for three centuries of injustice. Under the inspiration of religious ardor, he painted the pictures in the chapel of Beauregard; in moral subjects he personified the principal Christian virtues at the Hôtel Montmorency; and the immensity of Fontainebleau was filled to overflowing with his works. At the Golden Gate and in the Salle du Bal he treated the most graceful subjects of mythology and allegory; in the Gallery of Ulysses and the Chamber of Saint Louis he was an epic poet with Homer, and translated with his brush the Odyssey and a portion of the Iliad. Then he passed from the Age of Fable to heroic times, and historical subjects became his study. The principal incidents in the life of Alexander and Romulus, and the surrender of Havre, were reproduced in the painting with which he decorated the Grand

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Gallery and the apartment adjoining the Salle du Bal. He turned his attention to the beauties of nature in the great landscapes of the Cabinet of Curiosities. In short, if we care to take the measurement of his eminent talent, to consider the various forms in which it found expression, and to reckon up its work, we shall find that in ninety-eight large pictures and a hundred and thirty smaller ones he has treated, one after another, landscapes, marine views, historical, allegorical, and religious subjects, portraits, and the themes of epic poetry.

He was, as may be seen, a man likely to appreciate Benvenuto; and so, as soon as Benvenuto arrived at Paris, he ran to Primaticcio with open arms, and was welcomed by him in the same temper.

After the first serious conversation between the two friends meeting thus in a foreign land, Benvenuto opened his portfolio, imparted all his ideas to Primaticcio, showed him all his sketches, and asked him if there was any one of the models he was accustomed to use who fulfilled the necessary conditions.

Primaticcio shook his head, smiling sadly. In truth, they were no longer in Italy, the daughter of Greece and rival of her mother. France was in those days, as it is to-day, the land of grace, and prettiness, and coquetry; but in vain would one have sought in the domain of the Valois that imperious loveliness which inspired the genius of Michel-Angelo and Raphael, of John of Bologna and Andrea del Sarto, on the banks of the Tiber and the Arno. To be sure, if the painter or sculptor had been at liberty to choose a model at will among the aristocracy, he would soon have found the types he sought; but like those shades which are detained on this side of the Styx, he was perforce content

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to see those noble, lovely forms, the constant objects of his artistic aspirations, pass over into the Elysian Fields which he was forbidden to enter.

It turned out as Primaticcio anticipated: Benvenuto passed in review his whole army of models, and saw not one who seemed to combine all the qualities essential for the work of which he was dreaming.

Thereupon he caused all the Venuses at a crown the sitting whose names were furnished him to be summoned to the Cardinal of Ferrara's palace, where he was installed, but none of them fulfilled his expectations.

Benvenuto was almost at his wit's end when, one evening, as he was returning home alone along Rue des Petits-Champs, after supping with three compatriots whom he had met at Paris, — namely, Pietro Strozzi, the Count of Anguillara, his brother in law, and Galeotto Pico, nephew of the famous Pico della Mirandole, — he noticed a graceful, lovely girl walking in front of him. Benvenuto fairly leaped for joy: the girl was, of all whom he had thus far seen, by far the best qualified to give shape to his dream. He followed her, therefore. She walked along by the church of Saint-Honoré, and turned into Rue du Pelican; there she looked around to see if she was still followed, and, seeing Benvenuto within a few steps, hastily opened a door and disappeared. Benvenuto went to the same door and opened it in time to see the skirt of the young woman's dress disappear at a bend in the stairway, which was lighted by a smoking lamp.

He went up to the first floor: a chamber door stood ajar, and in the chamber he discovered the girl he had followed.

Without explaining the artistic motive of his intrusion, indeed, without saying a word, Benvenuto,

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desirous to ascertain whether the outlines of her body corresponded with those of her face, walked around and around the poor, bewildered girl, as he might have done had she been a statue, taking her arms and raising them above her head in the attitude which he proposed that his Nymph of Fontainebleau should assume; and she obeyed his gestures mechanically.

There was little of Ceres in the model now before his eyes, and still less of Diana, but very much of Erigone. The master thereupon made up his mind, in view of the manifest impossibility of finding the three types united in one person, to be satisfied with the Bacchante. But for the Bacchante he had certainly found all that he desired, — sparkling eyes, coral lips, teeth like pearls, graceful neck, well rounded shoulders, and broad hips; and in the slender wrists and ankles, and the long nails, there was a suggestion of aristocratic blood, which removed the artist's last hesitation.

"What is your name, mademoiselle?" Benvenuto, with his foreign accent, at last asked the poor girl, whose wonder momentarily increased.

"Catherine, monsieur, at your service," she replied.

"Very good! Here is a golden crown, Mademoiselle Catherine, for the trouble I have caused you. Come to me to-morrow at the Cardinal of Ferrara's hotel on Rue Saint-Martin, and I will give you as much more for the same service."

The girl hesitated an instant, thinking that he was making sport of her. But the gold crown seemed to prove that he was speaking seriously, and after a very brief pause, she said, —

"At what time?"

"Ten o'clock in the morning: does that suit your convenience?"

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"Perfectly."

"So that I may rely upon you?"

"I will come."

Benvenuto saluted her as he would have saluted a duchess, and returned home with a glad heart. He at once burned all his idealistic sketches, and set to work upon one based upon flesh and blood. Having completed the drawing, he placed a quantity of wax upon a pedestal, and beneath his dexterous touch it instantly assumed the shape of the nymph of whom he had dreamed; so that when Catherine appeared at the door of his studio the next morning, a part of his task was already done.

As we have said, Catherine utterly failed to understand Benvenuto's motives. She was vastly astonished, therefore, when, having closed the door behind her, he showed her the statue already begun, and explained why he had asked her to come.

Catherine was a light-hearted, joyous creature, and laughed heartily at her mistake; her bosom swelled with pride at the thought of posing as a model for a goddess to be presented to a king, so she removed her clothing, and of her own motion assumed the pose indicated by the statue, — so gracefully, and withal so exactly, that the artist, when he turned and saw her posed so naturally and well, exclaimed in delight.

Benvenuto at once set to work: his was, as we have said, one of those noble, vigorous, artistic natures in which inspiration is aroused by the work beneath their hands, and which seem to become illumined as their work proceeds. He had thrown aside his doublet, and as he went back and forth from the model to the copy, from nature to art, he seemed, with his bare neck and arms, like Jupiter, ready to kindle everything that he touched

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into flame. Catherine, accustomed to the commonplace or worn out organization of the young men of the lower classes with whom she had associated, or the young noblemen whose plaything she had been, gazed at this man with the inspired glance, quickened respiration, and swelling breast, with an unfamiliar sensation of wonder. She seemed herself to rise to the master's level; her eyes shone, and the artist's inspiration was comunicated to the model.

The sitting lasted two hours; at the end of that time Benvenuto gave Catherine her gold crown, and took leave of her as ceremoniously as before, making an appointment for the following day at the same hour.

Catherine returned to her own room, and did not go out during the day. The next morning she was at the studio ten minutes before the appointed time.

The same scene was repeated. On that day, as on the day before, Benvenuto's inspiration rose to sublime heights; beneath his hand, as beneath that of Prometheus, the clay seemed to breathe. The Bacchante's head was already modelled, and seemed a living head set upon a shapeless trunk. Catherine smiled upon this celestial sister, fashioned in her image; she had never been so happy, and, strangely enough, she was unable to explain the sentiment which caused her happiness.

On the following day the master and the model met again at the same hour; but Catherine was conscious of a sensation, absent on the preceding days, which caused the blood to rush to her face as soon as she began to disrobe. The poor child was beginning to love, and love brought modesty in its train.

On the fourth day it was still worse, and Benvenuto was compelled several times to remind her that he was not modelling the Venus de Medicis, but Erigone,

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drunken with debauchery and wine. Moreover, her patience would be tried but a little longer; two days more, and the model's services would be no longer required.

In the afternoon of the second day, Benvenuto, having given the last touch to his statue, thanked Catherine for her complaisance, and gave her four gold crowns; but Catherine let them fall to the floor. The poor child's dream was ended; from that moment she must return to her former condition, and that condition had become hateful to her since the day that she entered the master's studio. Benvenuto, who had no suspicion of what was taking place in the girl's heart, picked up the four crowns, handed them to her once more, pressing her hand as he did so, and said to her that, if he ever could be of service to her, she must apply to no one but him. Then he passed into the apartment where his apprentices were at work, seeking Ascanio, to whom he wished to exhibit his completed statue.

Catherine kissed the tools the master had used, one after another, and went away, weeping.

The next morning Catherine appeared at the studio while Benvenuto was alone, and when he, astonished to see her again, asked her why she had come, she knelt at his feet and asked him if he did not need a servant.

Benvenuto had an artist's heart, quick to detect feeling in another. He divined what was taking place in the poor child's heart, and raised her from the floor, kissing her upon the forehead as he did so.

From that moment Catherine was a part of the studio, which, as we have said, she brightened and made cheerful with her childish ways, and enlivened by her unceasing activity. She had become almost indispensable to everybody, above all to Benvenuto. She it was who

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superintended and managed everything, scolding and caressing Ruperta, who was dismayed at her first appearance in the household, but ended by loving her as everybody else did.

The Erigone lost nothing by this arrangement. Having the model always at hand, Benvenuto had retouched and perfected it with greater care than he had ever before bestowed upon one of his statues, and had then carried it to François I., whose admiration knew no bounds, and who ordered him to execute it in silver. He subsequently conversed for a long time with the goldsmith, asked him if he was pleased with his studio, where it was situated, and whether there were beautiful things to be seen there; and when he dismissed him, he determined in his own mind to take him by surprise some morning, but said nothing to him of his intention.

Thus did matters stand when this history opens, — Benvenuto working, Catherine singing, Ascanio dreaming, and Pagolo praying.

On the day following that on which Ascanio returned home so late, thanks to his excursion in the neighborhood of the Hôtel de Nesle, there was a loud knocking at the street door. Dame Ruperta at once rose to answer the summons, but Scozzone (the reader will remember that this was the name given to Catherine by Benvenuto) was already out of the room.

A moment later they heard her voice, half joyous, half terrified, crying, —

"O mon Dieu! master! mon Dieu! it is the king! The king in person has come to see your studio!"

And poor Scozzone, leaving all the doors open behind her, reappeared, pale and trembling, on the threshold of the workshop, where Benvenuto was at work, surrounded by his pupils and apprentices.

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V.

GENIUS AND ROYALTY.

In very truth, François I. was entering the courtyard with all his retinue. He led by the hand the Duchesse d'Etampes. The King of Navarre followed with the Dauphine, Catherine de Medicis. The Dauphin, afterwards Henri II., came next, with his aunt, Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre. Almost all the nobility accompanied them.

Benvenuto went to meet them, without confusion or embarrassment, and welcomed the king, princes, great lords, and beautiful women as a friend welcomes friends. And yet there were in the throng the most illustrious names of France, and the most resplendent beauties in the world. Marguerite charmed, Madame d'Etampes entranced, Catherine de Medicis astonished, Diane de Poitiers dazzled. But Benvenuto was familiar with the purest types of antiquity and of the sixteenth century in Italy, even as the beloved pupil of Michel-Angelo was accustomed to the society of kings.

"You must needs permit us, madame, to admire by your side the marvels we are to behold," said François I. to the Duchesse d'Etampes, who replied with a smile.

Anne de Pisseleu, Duchesse d'Etampes, who since the king's return from his captivity in Spain had succeeded the Comtesse de Châteaubriand in his favor, was at this time in all the splendor of a truly royal

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loveliness. Her figure was erect and graceful, and she carried her charming head with a dignity and feline grace which recalled at once the cat and panther, which she also resembled in her habit of pouncing upon one unexpectedly, and in her murderous appetites. With all this the royal courtesan was very clever at assuming an air of sincerity and candor which would disarm the most suspicious. Nothing could be more mobile or more treacherous than the features of this pale-lipped woman, to-day Hermione, to-morrow Galatea, with her smile, sometimes cajoling, sometimes terrible, — her glance, at one moment caressing and suggestive, and the next flaming with wrath. She had a habit of raising her eyelids so slowly that one could never tell whether they would disclose a languorous or a threatening expression. Haughty and imperious, she subjugated François I. by holding his passions enthralled; proud and jealous, she insisted that he should call upon the Comtesse de Châteaubriand to return the jewels he had given her; by returning them in the form of bullion, the lovely and melancholy countess did at least protest against the profanation. Supple and deceitful, she had closed her eyes more than once when the king's capricious fancy seemed to distinguish some charming young woman at court, whom, however, he invariably abandoned very soon to return to his beautiful enchantress.

"I was in haste to see you, Benvenuto, for two months have now passed since your coming to our realm, and vexatious affairs of state have since that time forbade my turning my thoughts to things artistic. Impute it to my brother and cousin, the Emperor, who gives me not a moment of repose."

"If it is your will, Sire, I will write to him, and pray that he will give you time to be a great friend to

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art, since you have proved to him ere this that you are a mighty captain."

"Pray, do you know Charles V.?" inquired the King of Navarre.

"Four years since, Sire, I had the honor, being then at Rome, to present a missal of my making to his sacred Majesty, and make a speech to him which seemed to touch him nearly."

"What said his sacred Majesty to you?"

"He said that he already knew me from having seen upon the Pope's cope, three years before, a carved stud, which did me honor."

"Ah! I see that you are spoiled for royal compliments," said François I.

"Sire, 't is true that I have had the fortune to please many cardinals, grand dukes, princes, and kings."

"Prithee, show me your beautiful designs, that I may see if I shall not be a harder judge to please than others."

"Sire, I have had very little time; however, here are a vase and silver basin which I have commenced, and which are perhaps not too unworthy of your Majesty's attention."

The king examined the two works of art for five minutes without a word. It seemed that the handiwork made him forget the workman. At last, as the ladies gathered curiously about him, he spoke.

"See, mesdames," he cried, "what marvellous workmanship! Observe the bold and novel shape of this vase! What ingenuity and marvellous modelling in the bas-reliefs and bosses, mon Dieu! Especially do I admire the beauty of the lines; and see how true to life and how diverse are the attitudes of the figures! Look at the one holding her arms over her head; the fugitive

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gesture is so naturally seized that one wonders that she does n't continue the movement. In very truth, I believe that the ancients never did anything so fine. I remember the best works of antiquity, and those of the most eminent artists of Italy; but nothing ever made so deep an impression upon me as this. O Madame de Navarre, I pray you look at this pretty child lost among the flowers, and waving her little foot in the air; how graceful and pretty and instinct with life it all is!"

"Others have complimented me, great king," cried Benvenuto, "but you understand me!"

"Have you aught else?" asked the king, greedily.

"Here is a medallion representing Leda and her swan, made for Cardinal Gabriel Cesarini; and here a seal cut in intaglio, representing Saint John and Saint Ambrose; this is a reliquary, enamelled by myself —"

"Do you strike medals?" interposed Madame d'Etampes.

"As Cavadone of Milan did, madame."

"And you work in enamel?" said Marguerite.

"Like Amerigo of Florence."

"And you engrave seals?" inquired Catherine.

"Like Lantizco of Perouse. Pray, did you think, madame, that my talent is confined to the production of tiny golden tôys and great silver pieces? I can do a little of everything, God be praised! I am a passable military engineer, and I have twice prevented the capture of Rome. I can turn a sonnet prettily, and your Majesty has but to order me to compose a poem, provided that it be in praise of yourself, and I will undertake to execute it neither better nor worse than if my name were Clement Marot. As to music, which my father taught me with a stick, I found the method an admirable one, and I am so good a performer on the

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flute and cornet that Clement VII. employed me among his musicians at the age of twenty-four. Furthermore, I discovered the secret of compounding an excellent powder, and I can also make beautiful carbines and surgical instruments. If your Majesty is at war, and chooses to employ me as man-at-arms, you will find that I am not to be despised in that capacity, and that I know as well how to handle an arquebus as to sight a culverin. As a hunter I have brought down my twenty-five peacocks in a day, and as an artillerist I have freed the Emperor from the Prince of Orange, and your Majesty from the Connétable de Bourbon: traitors seem not to be fortunate when they encounter me."

"Of which exploit are you the prouder," the young Dauphin interrupted, "of having killed the constable or the twenty-five peacocks?"

"I am proud of neither, monseigneur. Like all other gifts, address is God-given, and I simply used my address."

"By my faith, I was ignorant that you had already rendered me so great a service," said the king, — "a service which, however, my sister Marguerite will be at great pains to pardon you. Was it indeed you who slew the Connétable de Bourbon? Prithee, how came it to pass?"

"Mon Dieu! it was the simplest thing in the world. The constable's army had arrived unexpectedly before Rome, and a vigorous assault upon the fortifications was in progress. I sallied forth, with a few friends, to watch the fighting. As I left my house, I instinctively put my arquebus over my shoulder. When we reached the walls of the city, I saw that there was nothing to be done; but, I said to myself, it shall not be said that I came hither to so little purpose. So I aimed my

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arquebus toward the point where I saw a numerous and compact group of soldiers, and singled out one who stood a head taller than his companions. He fell, and a great uproar at once arose, caused by the shot I had fired. I had, in truth, slain Bourbon. I learned afterward that it was he who towered above his companions."

While Benvenuto was relating this incident with a most indifferent air, the circle of lords and ladies of which he was the centre spread out somewhat, and they all gazed with respect, and almost with terror, at this unconscious hero. François I. alone remained at his side.

"And so, my dear fellow," he said, "I see that you loaned me your gallantry before consecrating your genius to me."

"Sire," Benvenuto rejoined with a smile, "I believe, in good sooth, that I was born to be your servitor. An incident of my early youth has always seemed to me to admit of no other interpretation. Your crest is a salamander, is it not?"

"Yes, with this device: *Nutrisco et extinguo.*"

"Very well! When I was about five years old, I was sitting one day with my father in a small room where they had been scalding the lye, and where a rousing fire of young oak was still burning. It was very cold. Happening to glance at the fire, I espied a tiny creature like a lizard diverting itself in the spot where the heat was most intense. I pointed it out to my father, and my father — pray pardon me this detail of a somewhat brutal custom of my country — struck me a violent blow, and said to me, with great gentleness, 'I do not strike thee because thou hast done wrong, dear child, but so that thou mayst remember that the little lizard thou hast seen in the fire is a salamander. No

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human being has ever seen that animal save thou.' Was not that a premonition of fate, Sire? Indeed, I think I was predestined to do as I have done, for at the age of twenty I was about to set out for England, when the sculptor Pietro Torregiano, who was to take me thither, told me that in his youth he one day struck our Michel-Angelo in the face, on the occasion of some studio quarrel. Ah! I abandoned all thought of the journey then; not for a prince's title would I have travelled with one who had raised his hand against my great sculptor. I remained in Italy, and from Italy, instead of going to England, I came to France."

"France, proud of your choice, Benvenuto, will see to it that you do not sigh for your fatherland."

"Oh! my fatherland is art, and my prince he who commands the richest cup at my hands."

"Have you any beautiful work now in contemplation, Cellini?"

"O yes, Sire, — a Christ. Not a Christ upon the Cross, but Christ in His radiance and glory; and I shall copy as closely as possible the infinite beauty of the guise in which he revealed himself to me."

"What!" laughed Marguerite, the sceptic; "in addition to all the kings of earth, have you seen the King of Heaven, too?"

"Yes, madame," replied Benvenuto, with childlike simplicity.

"Oh! pray tell us of that," said the Queen of Navarre.

"Willingly, madame," said Benvenuto, with a confident air, which implied that it did not occur to him that any one could doubt any part of his story.

"Some time before," he continued, "I had seen Satan and all his legions, whom a necromancing friend of

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mine, a priest, evoked for me at the Coliseum. Indeed, we had much ado to rid ourselves of them. But the dread souvenir of those infernal apparitions was forever banished from my mind when, in answer to my fervent prayer, the blessed Saviour of mankind appeared to me, in a flood of sunlight, crowned with glory, and brought sweet consolation to me in the misery of my captivity."

"And are you sure beyond a peradventure," demanded the Queen of Navarre, "so sure that you have no shadow of doubt, that Christ really appeared to you?"

"I have no doubt of it, madame."

"In that case, Benvenuto, go on and fashion a Christ for our chapel," said François I., with his usual good humor.

"Sire, if your Majesty will so far indulge me, I pray you to order something different, and allow me to postpone the execution of that work."

"Why so?"

"Because I promised God to undertake it for no other sovereign than Him."

"*A la bonne heure!* Be it so! Benvenuto, I need twelve candlesticks for my table."

"Ah! that is a different matter; and therein, Sire, you shall be obeyed."

"It is my wish that they should take the form of twelve silver statues."

"The effect will be magnificent, Sire."

"They must represent six gods and six goddesses, and be of my own height."

"Why, your order is for a whole epic poem," said the Duchesse d'Etampes; "for a work of marvellous, surprising splendor, is it not, Monsieur Benvenuto?"

"I am never surprised, madame."

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"I should be greatly surprised, myself," retorted the duchess, somewhat piqued, "if other sculptors than those of the olden time could carry such a task to completion."

"I hope, nevertheless, to execute it as satisfactorily as they could have done," rejoined Benvenuto, coolly.

"Oho! are you not inclined to boast a little, Monsieur Benvenuto?"

"I never boast, madame."

As he made this reply with perfect calmness, Cellini looked at Madame d'Etampes, and the haughty duchess lowered her eyes, in spite of herself, under that firm, assured glance, in which there was no trace of irritation. Her resentment was aroused by the consciousness of his superiority, to which she yielded even while resisting it, and without knowing in what it consisted. She had thought hitherto that beauty was the greatest power in the world; she had forgotten genius.

"What treasure," said she, with a bitter sneer, "would suffice to recompense such talent as yours?"

"None that I can command, i' faith," rejoined François I., "and apropos, Benvenuto, I remember that you have as yet received but five hundred crowns. Will you be content with the stipend which I allowed my painter, Leonardo da Vinci, seven hundred gold crowns yearly? I will pay over and above that for all works which you may execute for me."

"Sire, your offer is worthy such a king as François I., and — I venture to say it — of such an artist as Cellini. And yet I shall make so bold as to prefer a request to your Majesty."

"It is granted in advance, Benvenuto."

"Sire, I am but ill and narrowly accommodated in this edifice. One of my pupils has discovered a location

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much more favorably situated than this for the execution of such great works as my king may choose to command. The property in question belongs to your Majesty; it is the Grand-Nesle. It is at the disposal of the Provost of Paris, but he does not dwell therein; he occupies only the Petit-Nesle, which I will gladly leave in his possession."

"So be it, Benvenuto," said François; "take up your abode at the Grand-Nesle, and I shall have only to cross the river to talk with you and admire your masterpieces."

"Consider, Sire," interposed Madame d'Etampes, "that you thereby, for no motive, deprive a nobleman, and one devoted to my service, of property appertaining to his office.

Benvenuto glanced at her, and for the second time Anne lowered her eyes beneath that steady, piercing gaze. Cellini rejoined, with the same naïve good faith with which he had described the supernatural apparitions: —

"I, too, am of noble birth, madame; my family descends from a gallant officer, who held high rank under Julius Cæsar, — one Fiorino, of Cellino, near Montefiascone, — and who gave his name to Florence; while your provost and his ancestors, if my memory serves me, have never given their name to anything. However," continued Benvenuto, turning to François, and changing his expression and his tone, "it may be that I have made too bold, — it may be that I shall incur the hatred of powerful and influential persons, who, despite your Majesty's protection, may prove too strong for me at last. The Provost of Paris is said to have something very like an army at his orders."

"I have been told," the king interrupted, "that on

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a certain day, at Rome, one Cellini, a goldsmith, retained, in default of payment therefor, a silver vase ordered by Monsieur Farnese, then cardinal, and to-day Pope."

"It is true, Sire."

"Furthermore, that the cardinal's whole household stormed the goldsmith's studio, sword in hand, with the design of carrying away the vase by force."

"That, too, is true."

"But this Cellini, in ambush behind the door, armed with his carbine, did defend himself so valorously that he put Monseigneur le Cardinal's people to flight; and was paid by the cardinal on the following day."

"All that, Sire, is strictly true."

"Very good! are not you the Cellini in question?"

"Yes, Sire; let your Majesty but continue to bestow your favor upon me and nothing has any power to terrify me."

"In that case, go straight before you," said the king, smiling in his beard; "go where you will, since you are of noble blood."

Madame d'Etampes said no more, but she registered a mental vow of deadly hatred to Cellini from that moment, — the hatred of an offended woman.

"One last favor, Sire," said Cellini. "I cannot present all my workmen to you; they are ten in number, some French, some German, all worthy, talented comrades. But here are my two pupils whom I brought from Italy with me, Pagolo and Ascanio. Come forward, Pagolo, and raise your head and your eyes a little; not impertinently, but like an honest man who has no evil action to blush for. This good fellow lacks inventive genius perhaps, Sire, and is slightly lacking in earnestness, too; but he is a careful, conscientious

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artist, who works slowly, but well, who comprehends my ideas perfectly, and executes them faithfully. And this is Ascanio, my noble-hearted, amiable pupil, and my beloved child. It is doubtless true that he has not the vigorous creative faculty which will represent in a bas-relief the serried ranks of two hostile armies meeting in deadly encounter, and tearing each other to pieces, or lions and tigers clinging with claws and teeth to the edge of a vase. Nor has he the original fancy which invents horrible chimeras and impossible dragons. No; but his soul, which resembles his body, has the instinct of a divine ideal, so to speak. Ask him to design an angel, or a group of nymphs, and no one can equal the exquisite poesy and grace of his work. With Pagolo I have four arms, with Ascanio I have two souls; and then he loves me, and I am very happy to have always by my side a pure and devoted heart like his."

While his master was speaking, Ascanio stood near him, modestly, but without embarrassment, in an attitude of unstudied grace, and Madame d'Etampes could not remove her eyes from the fascinating young Italian, black-eyed and black-haired, who seemed a living copy of Apollino.

"If Ascanio," said she, "understands grace and beauty so well, and if he cares to come some morning to the Hôtel d'Etampes, I will furnish him with precious stones and gold, with which he may cause some marvellous flower to bloom for me."

Ascanio bowed and thanked her with a glance.

"And I," said the king, "grant to him, as well as to Pagolo, a yearly pension of one hundred crowns."

"I undertake to make them earn their pension, Sire," said Benvenuto.

"But who is the lovely child with the long eye-

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lashes, hiding yonder in the corner?" said François, spying Scozzone for the first time.

"Oh, pay no attention to her, Sire," replied Benvenuto, with a frown; "she is the only one of the beautiful things in this studio whom I like not to have noticed."

"Aha! you are jealous, my Benvenuto."

"Mon Dieu! Sire, I like not that any hand should be laid upon my property; to compare small things with great, it is as if some other should dare to think of Madame d'Etampes; you would be furious, Sire. Scozzone is my duchess."

The duchess, who was gazing at Ascanio, bit her lips at this unceremonious interruption. Many courtiers smiled in spite of themselves, and all the ladies giggled. As for the king, he laughed outright.

"Foi de gentilhomme! your jealousy is within its right, Benvenuto, and an artist and a king may well understand each other. Adieu, my friend: I commend my statues to your attention. You will commence with Jupiter, naturally, and when you have finished the model you will show it to me. Adieu, and good luck! We will meet at the Hôtel de Nesle."

"To bid me show you the model is a simple matter, Sire; but how shall I gain entrance to the Louvre?"

"Your name will be given at the gates, with orders to introduce you to my presence."

Cellini bowed, and with Pagolo and Ascanio, escorted the king and court to the street. At the door he knelt and kissed the king's hand.

"Sire," he said with deep feeling, "you have heretofore saved me from captivity, perhaps from death, through the intervention of Monseigneur de Montluc; you have overwhelmed me with wealth, you have honored my poor

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studio with your presence; but far more than all this, Sire, is the fact, and I know not how to thank you that it is so, that you so magnificently anticipate all my dreams. We ordinarily work only for a chosen few scattered through the centuries, but I shall have had the signal honor of finding a living judge, always present, always enlightened. Until now I have been only the workman of the future; permit me henceforth to call myself your Majesty's goldsmith."

"My workman, my goldsmith, my artist, and my friend, Benvenuto, if the last title seems to you no more deserving of contempt than the others. Adieu, or rather, *au revoir*."

It is needless to say that all the princes and nobles followed the example set by the king, and loaded Cellini with flattery and offers of friendship.

When all were gone, and Benvenuto was left alone in the courtyard with his pupils, they thanked him, Ascanio effusively, Pagolo with something very like constraint.

"Nay, do not thank me, my children, it's not worth while. But look you, if you do in truth consider yourselves under any obligation to me, I wish, since this subject of conversation was introduced to-day, to ask a service at your hands; it relates to something which I have very much at heart. You heard what I said to the king apropos of Catherine, and what I said to him truly expressed the deepest feeling of my heart. The child is necessary to my life, my friends; to my life as an artist, because, as you know, her services as a model are offered so freely and joyously; to my life as a man, because I think that she loves me. I pray you, therefore, although she is beautiful, and although you are young, as she also is, do not let your thoughts rest upon Catherine; there are enough other lovely girls in the world. Do not tear

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my heart, do not insult my affection by casting bold glances upon my Scozzone; nay, rather watch over her in my absence, and advise her as if you were her brothers. I conjure you, observe my wishes herein, for I know myself and my feeling in this matter, and I swear before God, that if I should discover aught amiss, I would kill her and her accomplice."

"Master," said Ascanio, "I respect you as my master, and I love you as my father; have no fear."

"Blessed Jesus!" cried Pagolo, clasping his hands, "may God preserve me from thinking of such an infamous action! Do I not know that I owe everything to you, and would it not be a crime thus to abuse your sacred confidence in me, and to repay your benefactions by such dastardly treachery?"

"Thanks, my friends," said Benvenuto, pressing their hands. "I have perfect faith in you, and I am content. Now, Pagolo, return to your work, for I have promised the seal at which you are working to M. de Villeroi for to-morrow; while Ascanio and myself pay a visit to the estate which our gracious king has bestowed upon us, and of which we will take possession on Sunday next, peaceably or by force."

Then he turned to Ascanio.

"Come, Ascanio," said he, "let us go and see if this Nesle habitation, which seemed to you so eligible in its external aspect, has internal appointments corresponding to its reputation."

Before Ascanio had time to offer any observation, Benvenuto, with a parting glance over the studio to see if every workman was in his place, and a light tap upon Scozzone's plump, rosy cheek, passed his arm through his pupil's, drew him toward the door, and went out with him.

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VI.

TO WHAT USE A DUENNA MAY BE PUT.

THEY had taken hardly ten steps in the street, when they met a man of some fifty years, rather short of stature, but with a handsome, mobile countenance.

"I was about to call upon you, Benvenuto," said the new arrival, whom Ascanio saluted with respect, mingled with veneration, and whose hand Benvenuto cordially grasped.

"Is your business of importance, my dear Francesco?" said the goldsmith. "In that case, I will return with you; or was it for no other purpose than a friendly call? In that case, come with us."

"It was to proffer you some friendly advice, Benvenuto."

"I will gladly listen. Advice is always a good thing to receive when it is proffered by a friend."

"But that which I have to give you is for no other ear than yours."

"This youth is another myself, Francesco; say on."

"I would already have done so, had I thought that I ought to do it," replied Benvenuto's friend.

"Pardon, master," said Ascanio, discreetly moving apart.

"Very well; go alone whither I purposed going with you, dear boy," said Benvenuto; "as you know, when you have seen a thing it is as if I had myself seen it. Look most carefully into every detail: see if the

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studio will have a good light, if the courtyard will be a convenient place for a furnace, and if it will be possible to separate our workshop from that of the other apprentices. Do not forget the tennis-court."

With that Benvenuto passed his arm through the stranger's, waved his hand to Ascanio, and returned to the studio, leaving the young man standing in the middle of Rue Saint-Martin.

In very truth there was in the commission intrusted to him by his master more than enough to embarrass Ascanio. His embarrassment was by no means slight, even when Benvenuto proposed that they should make the visit of inspection in company. Judge, then, what it became when he found himself confronted with the prospect of making it all alone. He had watched Colombe two Sundays without daring to follow her, had followed her on the third without daring to accost her, and now he was to present himself at her home; and for what purpose? To examine the Hôtel de Nesle, which Benvenuto proposed, by way of pastime, to take from Colombe's father on the following Sunday, willy-nilly.

It was a false position for anybody; it was terrible for a lover.

Fortunately it was a long distance from Rue Saint-Martin to the Hôtel de Nesle. Had it been only a step or two, Ascanio would not have taken them; but it was a half-league, so he started.

Nothing so familiarizes one with danger as to be separated from it by a considerable time or distance. To all strong minds and happy dispositions, reflection is a powerful auxiliary. Ascanio belonged to the latter class. In those days it was not fashionable to be disgusted with life before one had fairly entered upon it. All the impulses were ingenuous and ingenuously expressed, — joy

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by laughter, sorrow by tears. Affectation was a thing almost unknown, in life as in art, and a comely youth of twenty was in no wise ashamed in those days to confess that he was happy

But in all Ascanio's embarrassment there was a certain amount of joy. He had not expected to see Colombe again until the following Sunday, and he was to see her that very day. Thus he had gained six days, and six days of waiting are, as everybody knows, six centuries according to a lover's reckoning.

And so, as he approached his destination, the affair became more simple in his eyes. He it was, to be sure, who had advised Benvenuto to ask the king for the Hôtel de Nesle for his studio, but could Colombe take it ill of him that he had desired to be near her? This installation of the Florentine goldsmith in the old palace of Amaury could not, it was true, be carried out without interference with Colombe's father, who looked upon it as his own; but would any real injury be inflicted upon Messire Robert d'Estourville when he did not occupy it? Moreover, there were a thousand ways in which Benvenuto could pay for his occupancy; — a chased cup for the provost, a necklace for his daughter (and Ascanio would undertake to make the necklace), might, and undoubtedly would, in that artistic age, make the rough places smooth. Ascanio had seen grand dukes, kings, and popes ready to give their coronets, sceptres, or tiaras as the price of one of the marvellous examples of his master's art. After all, then, supposing that matters should take that course, Messire Robert would eventually be in Master Benvenuto's debt; for Master Benvenuto was so generous that, if Messire Robert showed a disposition to be courteous and compliant, Ascanio was certain that he, Master Benvenuto, would deal right royally with him.

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By the time he reached the end of Rue Saint-Martin, Ascanio looked upon himself as a messenger of peace, chosen by the Lord to maintain harmonious relations between two powers.

And yet, notwithstanding that conviction, Ascanio was not sorry — surely lovers are strange creatures — to lengthen his journey by ten minutes, and instead of crossing the Seine by boat, he walked the whole length of the quays, and crossed by the Pont aux Moulins. It may be that he chose that road because it was the same he had taken the evening before when following Colombe.

Whatever his motive for making the detour, he finally found himself in front of the Hôtel de Nesle in about twenty minutes.

But when he saw the little ogive door that he must pass through, when he saw the turrets of the lovely little Gothic palace boldly raising their heads above the wall, when he thought that behind those jalousies, half closed because of the heat, was his beautiful Colombe, the whole card-house of happy dreams which he had built on the road vanished like the structures one sees in the clouds, and which the wind overturns with one blow of its wing; he found himself face to face with reality, and reality did not seem to him the most reassuring thing in the world.

However, after a few moments of hesitation — hesitation which is the harder to understand, in that he was absolutely alone upon the quay in the intense heat — he realized that he must make up his mind to do something. As there was nothing for him to do but find his way into the hotel, he walked to the door and raised the knocker. But God only knows when he would have let it fall, had not the door chanced to open at that moment, bringing him face to face with a sort of Master Jacques, a man

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he was least expecting it, and of all the beautiful speech he had prepared, the fervent eloquence of which was to amaze and move her, he could not recall a phrase, a word, a syllable.

Colombe, for her part, sat motionless and dumb. The two pure-souled young creatures, who, as if they had been already joined in wedlock in heaven, felt that they belonged to one another, and who, when once their lives had brought them close together, would thenceforth form, like Salmacis and Hermaphrodite, but one existence, were terrified at their first meeting, trembled, hesitated, and stood face to face unable to find words.

Dame Perrine, half rising from her chair, and preparing to put aside her spinning, was the first to break the silence.

"What did that blockhead Raimbault say?" cried the worthy duenna. "Did you hear, Colombe?" As Colombe did not reply, she continued, walking toward Ascanio: "What is your pleasure here, my young master? Why, God forgive me!" she suddenly exclaimed, as she recognized the visitor, "it 's the gallant youth who so politely handed me the holy water at the church door these last three Sundays! What is your pleasure, my handsome friend?"

"I would be glad to speak with you," faltered Ascanio.

"With me alone?" queried Dame Perrine coquettishly.

"With you — alone —"

As he made this reply Ascanio told himself that he was a consummate ass.

"Come this way, then, young man," said Dame Perrine, opening a door at the side of the room, and signing to Ascanio to follow her.

Ascanio did as she bade him, but as he left the room he cast upon Colombe one of those long, eloquent glances wherein lovers can say so much, and which, however

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unintelligible they may be to indifferent observers, are always understood at last by the person to whom they are addressed. Colombe undoubtedly lost no portion of its meaning, for her eyes, how she knew not, having met the youth's, she blushed prodigiously, and when she felt that she was blushing, she cast her eyes down upon her embroidery, and began to mangle a poor inoffensive flower. Ascanio saw the blush, and, stopping abruptly, stepped toward Colombe; but at that moment Dame Perrine turned and called him, and he was compelled to follow her.

He had no sooner crossed the threshold of the door than Colombe dropped her needle, let her arms fall beside her chair, threw back her head, and breathed a long sigh, in which were mingled, by one of those inexplicable miracles which the heart alone can perform, regret at Ascanio's departure, and a sort of relief to feel that he was no longer there.

The young man was very perceptibly in a bad humor; with Benvenuto, who had given him such a strange commission to fulfil; with himself, for his inability to take advantage of his opportunity; but most of all with Dame Perrine, who was cruel enough to make him leave the room just when Colombe's eyes seemed to bid him remain.

So it was that, when the duenna inquired as to the purpose of his visit, Ascanio replied in a most deliberate manner, determined to be revenged upon her for his own bungling:—

"The purpose of my visit, my dear Madame, is to beg you to show me the Hôtel de Nesle from one end to the other."

"Show you the Hôtel de Nesle!" cried Dame Perrine; "why, in Heaven's name, do you desire to see it?"

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"To see if it will be convenient for us, if we shall be comfortable here, and if it is worth while for us to leave our present quarters to come and live here."

"What! come and live here! Pray have you hired the hotel of Monsieur le Prévôt?"

"No, but his Majesty gives it to us."

"His Majesty gives it to you!" exclaimed Dame Perrine, more and more amazed.

"Absolutely," replied Ascanio.

"To you?"

"Not precisely, my good woman, but to my master."

"And who is your master, if I may ask, young man? Some great foreign nobleman, no doubt?"

"Better than that, Dame Perrine, — a great artist, come hither from Florence, expressly to serve his Most Christian Majesty."

"Aha!" said the good woman, who did not understand very well; "what does your master make?"

"What does he make? Why, he makes everything: rings to put on maidens' fingers; ewers to put upon kings' tables; statues to place in the temples of the gods; and in his leisure moments he besieges or defends cities, as his caprice leads him to cause an emperor to tremble, or to reassure a pope."

"Jésus Dieu!" cried Dame Perrine: "what is your master's name?"

"His name is Benvenuto Cellini."

"It 's strange that I don't know that name," muttered the duenna; "what is his profession?"

"He is a goldsmith."

Dame Perrine gazed wonderingly at Ascanio.

"A goldsmith!" she muttered, "a goldsmith! And do you fancy that Monsieur le Prévôt will give up his palace like this to a — goldsmith?"

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"If he does n't give it up, we will take it."

"By force?"

"Even so."

"But your master will hardly dare to contend against Monsieur le Prévôt, I trust."

"He has contended against three dukes and two popes."

"Jésus Dieu! Two popes! He 's not a heretic surely?"

"He is as good a Catholic as you and I, Dame Perrine: have no fear on that score; Satan is in no wise our ally. But in default of the devil, we have the king on our side."

"So! but Monsieur le Prévôt has a more powerful protector than the king."

"Whom has he, pray?"

"Madame d'Etampes."

"Then we are on equal terms," said Ascanio.

"But suppose Messire d'Estourville refuses?"

"Master Benvenuto will take."

"And suppose Messire d'Estourville shuts himself up here as in a citadel?"

"Master Cellini will lay siege to it."

"Consider that the provost has twenty-four sergeants-at-arms."

"Master Benvenuto Cellini has ten apprentices: still we are on equal terms, you see, Dame Perrine."

"But Messire d'Estourville is personally a sturdy fighter. At the tournament which took place at the time of the marriage of François I., he was one of the challengers, and all those who dared measure swords with him were unhorsed."

"Ah well! Dame Perrine, then he is just the man for Benvenuto, who has never met his match, and who,

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like Messire d'Estourville, always unhorses his adversaries. But there is this difference between them: a fortnight afterward, they who have encountered your provost are on their legs again in good health and spirits, while they who have my master to deal with never raise their heads again, and three days after are dead and buried."

"Evil will come of this! evil will come of this!" muttered Dame Perrine. "Young man, they say that fearful things are done in cities taken by assault."

"Have no fear on that head, Dame Perrine," rejoined Ascanio with a smile. "You will have to do with generous conquerors."

"What I mean, my dear child," said Dame Perrine, who was not sorry perhaps, to secure a friend among the besiegers, "is that I fear there may be bloodshed; for, so far as your proximity to us is concerned, you will understand that it cannot fail to be very agreeable to us, since society is somewhat scanty in this accursed desert to which Messire d'Estourville has consigned his daughter and myself, like two wretched nuns, although neither she nor I have taken the vows, thank God! It is n't good for man to be alone, so saith Holy Writ, and when Holy Writ mentions man, woman is included. Is not that your opinion, young man?"

"That goes without saying."

"And we are entirely alone, and therefore very doleful in this vast habitation."

"Why, do you receive no visitors here?" Ascanio asked.

"Jésus Dieu! it 's worse than if we were nuns, as I told you. Nuns have parents at least, and friends who come and talk to them through the grating. They have the refectory where they can assemble and talk together. It 's not very diverting, I know, but it 's something never-

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theless. But we have only Messire le Prévôt, who comes from time to time to lecture his daughter for growing too lovely, I think, — it 's her only crime, poor child, — and to scold me because I don't watch her closely enough, — God save the mark! when she does n't see a living soul in the world except myself, and, aside from what she says to me, does n't open her mouth except to pray. I beg you, therefore, young man, not to say to any one that you have been admitted here, that you have inspected the Grand-Nesle under my guidance, or that you talked with us for an instant at the Petit-Nesle."

"What!" cried Ascanio, "after our visit to the Grand-Nesle, I am to return with you to the Petit? In that case I shall — " He checked himself, realizing that his joy was carrying him too far.

"I think it would not be courteous, young man, after presenting yourself, as you did, to Mademoiselle Colombe, who is the mistress of the house in her father's absence, and after asking to speak with me alone, — I do not think it would be courteous, I say, to leave the Hôtel de Nesle without taking leave of her. But if you prefer not to do so, you are quite at liberty, as you know, to go into the street directly from the Grand-Nesle, which has its own exit."

"No, no, no indeed!" cried Ascanio, eagerly. "Peste! I flatter myself, Dame Perrine, that I have been as well brought up as anybody on earth, and that I know what good breeding requires in one's treatment of ladies. But, let us do what we have to do, Dame Perrine, without a moment's delay, for I am in very great haste."

Indeed, now that Ascanio knew that he was to return by way of the Petit-Nesle he was in a great hurry to be done with the Grand. And as Dame Perrine was terribly afraid of being surprised by the provost when she

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least expected it, she had no inclination to delay Ascanio! so she took down a bunch of keys from behind a door, and walked on before him.

Let us, in company with Ascanio, cast a hasty glance at this Hôtel de Nesle, where the principal scenes of our narrative will be laid.

The Hôtel, or rather the Séjour de Nesle, as it was more commonly called at that time, occupied, as our readers already know, the site on the left bank of the Seine, on which the Hôtel de Nevers was subsequently built, to be in its turn succeeded by the Mint and the Institute. It was the last building in Paris toward the southwest, and beyond its walls nothing could be seen save the city moat, and the verdant lawns of the Pré-aux-Clercs. It was built by Amaury, Lord of Nesle in Picardie, toward the close of the eighth century. Philippe le Bel bought it in 1308 and made it his royal residence. In 1520 the Tour de Nesle, of bloody and licentious memory, was separated from it, when the quay, the bridge over the moat, and the Porte de Nesle were constructed, and thenceforth the grim tower stood alone upon the river bank, like a sinner doing penance.

But the Séjour de Nesle luckily was so vast that the lopping off of part of it was not noticed. It was as large as a small village; a high wall, pierced by a broad ogive door and a smaller servants' door, protected it on the side of the quay. On entering you found yourself at first in an immense courtyard surrounded by walls; there was a door in the wall at the left, and one at the back. Passing through the door at the left, as Ascanio did, you came to a charming little building in the Gothic style of the fourteenth century; it was the Petit-Nesle, which had its own separate garden. If, on the other hand, you passed through the door in the rear wall, you saw

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at your right the Grand-Nesle, — all of stone, and flanked by two turrets, — with its high peaked roofs, surrounded by balustrades, its angular façade, its high windows with glass of many colors, and its twenty weather-vanes crying in the wind; there was room enough to provide accommodation for three bankers of to-day.

If you went on, you lost yourself in all sorts of gardens, and you found among them a tennis-court, a bowling-green, a foundry, and an arsenal; and still farther on the stable-yards, stables, cattle-sheds, and sheepfolds; there was accommodation for the establishments of three farmers of to-day.

The whole property, it should be said, was sadly neglected, and consequently in very bad condition, for Raimbault and his two assistants hardly sufficed to take proper care of the garden belonging to the Petit-Nesle, where Colombe raised flowers, and Dame Perrine vegetables. But the whole was of vast extent, well lighted, and substantially built, and with a slight outlay of trouble and money, it could be made the finest workshop in the world.

Even if the place had been infinitely less suitable, Ascanio would have been none the less enchanted with it, as his principal desire was to be brought near to Colombe.

His visit to the larger building was made very short: in less time than it takes to write it, the active youth saw everything that there was to see, and formed an opinion upon everything that he saw. Dame Perrine, finding it impossible to keep pace with him, good-naturedly handed him the keys, which he faithfully restored to her when his investigation was at an end.

"Now, Dame Perrine," said he, "I am at your service."

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"Very good: let us return for a moment to the Petit-Nesle, as you agree with me that it is the proper thing to do."

"I should say as much! It would be extremely discourteous to do otherwise."

"But not a word to Colombe of the object of your visit."

"Mon Dieu! what shall I say to her, then?" cried Ascanio.

"You 're easily embarrassed, my handsome lad. Did you not tell me that you are a goldsmith?"

"Indeed, yes."

"Very well, talk to her about jewels; that is a subject that always gladdens the heart of the most virtuous maiden. She is or is not a true daughter of Eve, and if she is a true daughter of Eve she loves anything that glitters. Besides, she has so little diversion in her solitude, poor child! that it would be a blessing to entertain her a little. To be sure, the most suitable entertainment for a girl of her age would be a good marriage; and Master Robert never comes hither that I do not whisper in his ear, 'Find a husband for the poor dear; pray find a husband for her.'"

Without stopping to consider what conjectures as to the relations between herself and the provost might be set on foot by this declaration of her familiar manner of addressing him, Dame Perrine led the way back to the Petit-Nesle and to the room where they had left Colombe.

Colombe was still absorbed in thought, and in the same attitude in which we left her. But no one knows how many times she had raised her head and fixed her eyes upon the door through which the comely youth had gone from her sight; any one who had observed these

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oft-repeated glances might have thought that she was expecting him. But as she saw the door turning upon its hinges, Colombe went about her work once more so earnestly that neither Dame Perrine nor Ascanio could suspect that it had been interrupted.

How she had divined that the young man was following the duenna is something that might have been explained by magnetism, if magnetism had then been invented.

"I bring back with me our donor of holy water, my dear Colombe, for he it is, as I thought. I was about to show him out by the door of the Grand-Nesle, when he reminded me that he had not taken leave of you. It was true enough, for you did n't say one little word to each other before. However, neither of you is dumb, God be praised!"

"Dame Perrine —" faltered Colombe, greatly embarrassed.

"Well! what is it? You must not blush like that. Monsieur Ascanio is an honorable young man, as you are a virtuous young woman. Furthermore, it seems that he is an artist in jewels, precious stones, and such gewgaws as suit the fancy of most pretty girls. He will come and show them to you, my child, if you wish."

"I need nothing," murmured Colombe.

"Possibly not at this moment; but it is to be hoped that you will not die a recluse in this accursed solitude. We are but sixteen years old, Colombe, and the day will come when we shall be a lovely *fiancée*, to whom all sorts of jewels will be presented, and after that a great lady, who must have all sorts of finery. When that time comes, it will be as well to give the preference to this youth's as to those of some other artist, who surely will not be comparable to him."

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Colombe was on the rack. Ascanio, to whom Dame Perrine's forecasts of the future were but moderately pleasing, noticed her suffering, and came to the rescue of the poor child, to whom direct conversation was a thousand times less embarrassing than this monologue by a self-constituted interpreter.

"Oh! mademoiselle," said he, "do not deny me the great privilege of bringing some of my handiwork to you; it seems to me now as if I made them for you, and as if when making them I was thinking of you. Oh! believe it, I pray you, for we artists in jewels sometimes mingle our own thoughts with the gold and silver and precious stones. In the diadems with which your heads are crowned, the bracelets which encircle your white arms, the necklaces which rest so lovingly upon your shoulders, in the flowers, the birds, the angels, the chimeras, which we make to tremble at your ears, we sometimes embody our respectful adoration."

It is our duty as an historian to state that at these soft words Colombe's heart dilated, for Ascanio, mute so long, was speaking at last, and speaking as she had dreamed that he would speak; for without raising her eyes the girl could feel his burning glance fixed upon her, and there was nothing, even to the unfamiliar tone of his voice, which did not impart a singular charm to these words which sounded so strangely in Colombe's ears, and a profound and irresistible meaning to the flowing, harmonious language of love, which maidens understand before they can speak it.

"I know," Ascanio continued, with his eyes still fixed upon Colombe, "I know that we can add nothing to your beauty. God is made none the richer by decking out his altar. But we can at least surround your graceful form with those things which are attractive and

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beautiful like itself; and when we poor, humble artificers of splendor and enchantment from the depths of our obscurity see you pass by in a blaze of glory, we console ourselves for being so far below you by the thought that our art has helped to raise you to the height whereon you stand."

"O Monsieur!" replied Colombe, covered with confusion, "your lovely things will probably be always unfamiliar to me, or at least useless. I live in solitude and obscurity, and so far is it from being the case that the solitude and obscurity are oppressive to me, that I confess that I love them, I confess that I would like to live here always, and yet I also confess that I would like well to see your jewels, not for myself but for them, — not to wear them, but to admire them."

Trembling with fear lest she had said too much, and perhaps with a longing to say even more, Colombe bowed and left the room so swiftly, that to the eyes of a man more knowing in such matters her exit would have worn the aspect of a flight.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Dame Perrine; "that 's not a long way from something like coquetry. There is no doubt, young man, that you talk like a book. Yes, yes, one can but believe that you Italians have secret means of fascinating people. No stronger proof is needed than this, — that you have enlisted me on your side at once, and 'pon honor, I find myself wishing that Messire le Prévôt will not deal too hardly with you. *Au revoir*, young man, and bid your master be on his guard. Warn him that Messire d'Estourville is as hard of heart as the devil, and wields great influence at court. For which reason, if your master will take my advice, he will abandon all thought of living at the Grand-Nesle, and especially of taking forcible possession of it. As for you —

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but we shall see you again, shall we not? Above all, do not believe Colombe; the property of her deceased mother is sufficient to enable her to indulge in baubles twenty times more costly than those you offer her. And look you, bring also some less elaborate articles; it may occur to her to make me a little present. I am not yet, thank God! so old that I need decline a little flirtation. You understand, do you not?"

Deeming it necessary, the better to make her meaning clear, to enforce her words with a gesture, she laid her hand upon the young man's arm. Ascanio jumped like one suddenly awakened from a sound sleep. Indeed, it seemed to him as if it were all a dream. He could not realize that he was under Colombe's roof, and he doubted whether the white apparition whose melodious voice was still whispering in his ear, whose slender form had just vanished from his sight, was really she for one glance from whose eyes he would have given his life that morning.

Overflowing with his present happiness and his future prospects, he promised Dame Perrine whatever she wished, without even listening to what she asked him to do. What mattered it to him? Was he not ready to give all that he possessed to see Colombe once more?

Thinking that to prolong his visit would be unbecoming, he took leave of Dame Perrine, promising to return the next day.

As he left the Petit-Nesle, Ascanio almost collided with two men who were about to enter. By the way in which one of them stared at him, even more than by his costume, he felt sure that it was the provost.

His suspicion was changed to certainty when he saw them knock at the same door by which he had just come out, and he regretted that he had not sooner taken his

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leave; for who could say that his imprudence would not be visited upon Colombe?

To negative the idea that his visit was of any importance, assuming that the provost noticed it, Ascanio walked away without once turning to look back toward the only corner of the world of which he would at that moment have cared to be king.

When he returned to the studio, he found Benvenuto absorbed in thought. The man who stopped them in the street was Primaticcio, and he was on his way, like the honorable confrère he was, to inform Cellini that, during the visit François I. paid him that morning, the imprudent artist had succeeded in making a mortal enemy of Madame la Duchesse d'Etampes.

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VII

A LOVER AND A FRIEND.

One of the two men who entered the Hôtel de Nesle as Ascanio emerged therefrom was indeed Messire Robert d'Estourville, Provost of Paris. Who the other was we shall learn in a moment.

Five minutes after Ascanio's departure, while Colombe was still listening and dreaming in her bedroom, whither she had fled, Dame Perrine hurriedly entered, and informed the young woman that her father was awaiting her in the adjoining room.

"My father!" cried Colombe in alarm. "Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" she added in an undertone, "can it be that he met him?"

"Yes, your father, my dear child," rejoined Dame Perrine, replying to the only portion of the sentence that she heard, "and with him another old man whom I do not know."

"Another old man!" exclaimed Colombe, shuddering instinctively. "Mon Dieu! Dame Perrine, what does it mean? It is the first time in two or three years that my father has not come hither alone."

However, notwithstanding her alarm she could but obey, knowing as she did her father's impatient disposition, so she summoned all her courage and returned to the room she had just left with a smile upon her lips. Despite this feeling of dread, which she experienced for the first time and could not explain, she loved Messire

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d'Estourville as a daughter should love her father, and although his demeanor toward her was far from expansive, the days on which he visited the Hôtel de Nesle were marked as red-letter days among the uniformly gloomy days of her life.

Colombe went forward with outstretched arms and her mouth half open, but the provost gave her no time either to embrace him or to speak. He took her hand, and led her to the stranger, who was leaning against the flower-laden mantel.

"My dear friend," he said, "I present my daughter to you. Colombe, "he added, "this is Comte d'Orbec, the king's treasurer and your future husband."

Colombe uttered a feeble exclamation, which she at once stifled, out of regard for the requirements of courtesy; but feeling her knees giving way beneath her, she leaned against the back of a chair for support.

Fully to understand the horror of this unexpected presentation, especially in Colombe's then frame of mind, it is necessary to know what manner of man this Comte d'Orbec was.

Messire Robert d'Estourville, Colombe's father, was certainly far from handsome; there was in his bushy eyebrows, which he drew together at the least obstacle, physical or moral, that he encountered, a savage expression, and in his whole thickset figure something heavy and awkward, which caused one to feel but slightly prepossessed in his favor; but beside Comte d'Orbec he seemed like Saint Michael the Archangel beside the dragon. The square head and the strongly accentuated features of the provost did at least indicate resolution and force of character, while his small, piercing gray lynx eyes denoted intelligence; but Comte d'Orbec, lean and withered, with his long arms like spider's claws his mosquito-

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like voice and his snail-like movements, was not only ugly, he was absolutely hideous; — it was the ugliness of the beast and the villain in one. His head was carried on one side, and his face wore a villanous smile and a treacherous expression.

So it was that Colombe, at the sight of this revolting creature, who was presented to her as her future husband when her heart and her thoughts and her eyes were still filled with the comely youth who had just gone from that very room, could not, as we have seen, wholly repress an exclamation of dismay; but her strength failed her, and she stood there pale and speechless, gazing terror-stricken into her father's face.

"I beseech you to pardon Colombe's confusion, dear friend," the provost continued; "in the first place, she is a little barbarian, who has not been away from here these two years past, the air of the time being not over healthy, as you know, for attractive maids; secondly, I have made the mistake of not informing her of our plans, which would have been time lost, however, since what I have determined upon needs no person's approval before being put in execution; and lastly, she knows not who you are, and that with your name, your great wealth, and the favor of Madame d'Etampes, you are in a position where everything is possible; but upon reflection she will appreciate the honor you confer upon us in consenting to ally your ancient blood with our nobility of more recent date; she will learn that friends of forty years' standing — "

"Enough, my dear fellow, enough, in God's name!" interposed the count. "Come, come, my child," he added, addressing Colombe with familiar and insolent assurance, which formed a striking contrast to poor Ascanio's timidity, — "come, compose yourself and call back to your

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cheeks a little of the lovely coloring that so becomes you. Mon Dieu! I know what a young girl is, you know, and a young woman too for that matter, for I have already been married twice, my dear. Good lack! you must not be disturbed like this: I don't frighten you, I hope, eh?" added the count fatuously, passing his fingers through his scanty moustache and imperial. "Your father did wrong to give me the title of husband so suddenly, which always agitates a youthful heart a little when it hears it for the first time; but you will come to it, little one, and will end by saying it yourself with that sweet little mouth of yours. Well! well! you are growing paler and paler, — God forgive me! I believe she is fainting."

As he spoke D'Orbec put out his arms to support her, but she stood erect, and stepped back as if she feared his touch no less than a serpent's, finding strength to utter a few words: —

"Pardon, monsieur, pardon, father," she faltered; "forgive me, it is nothing; but I thought, I hoped —"

"What did you think, what did you hope? Come, tell us quickly!" rejoined the provost, fixing his sharp eyes, snapping angrily, upon his daughter.

"That you would allow me to stay with you always, father," replied Colombe. "Since my poor mother's death, you have no one else to love you and care for you, and I had thought —"

"Hold your peace, Colombe," retorted the provost imperatively. "I am not old enough as yet to need a keeper, and you have arrived at the proper age to have an establishment of your own.

"Bon Dieu!" interposed D'Orbec, joining once more in the conversation, "accept me without so much ado, my love. With me you will be as happy as one can be, and

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more than one will envy you, I swear. Mordieu! I am rich, and I propose that you shall be a credit to me; you shall go to court, and shall wear jewels that will arouse the envy, I will not say of the queen, but of Madame d'Etampes herself."

I know not what thoughts these last words awoke in Colombe's heart, but the color returned to her cheeks, and she made bold to answer the count, despite her father's harsh and threatening glance: —

"I will ask my father, monseigneur, at least to give me time to reflect upon your proposal."

"What 's that?" cried Messire d'Estourville violently. "Not an hour, not a minute. You are from this moment the count's betrothed, understand that, and you would be his wife this evening were it not that he is obliged to pay a visit to his estates in Normandie, and you know that my wishes are commands. Reflect indeed! Sarpejeu! D'Orbec, let us leave her ladyship. From this moment, my friend, she is yours, and you may claim her when you will. And now let us go and inspect your future abode."

D'Orbec would have been glad to tarry and add a word to what he had already said, but the provost passed his arm through his, and led him away grumbling; he contented himself therefore with saluting Colombe with his wicked smile, and went out with Messire Robert.

Behind them Dame Perrine entered through another door; she had heard the provost speaking in a loud voice, and guessed that he was as usual scolding his daughter. She arrived in time to receive Colombe in her arms.

"O mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" sobbed the poor child, putting her hand over her eyes as if to avoid the sight of the odious D'Orbec, absent though he was. "O mon

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Dieu! is this to be the end? O my golden dreams! O my poor hopes! All is lost, and naught remains for me but to die!"

We need not ask if this lament, added to Colombe's weakness and pallor, terrified Dame Perrine, and at the same time aroused her curiosity. As Colombe sadly needed to relieve her overburdened heart, she described to her worthy governess, weeping the while the bitterest tears she had ever shed, the interview between her father, Comte d'Orbec, and herself. Dame Perrine agreed that the suitor was not young or handsome, but as the worst misfortune, in her opinion, that could happen to a woman was to remain single, she insisted that it was better, when all was said, to have an old and ugly, but wealthy and influential husband, than none at all. But this doctrine was so offensive to Colombe's heart, that she withdrew to her own room, leaving Dame Perrine, whose imagination was most active, to build innumerable castles in the air in anticipation of the day when she should rise from the rank of Mademoiselle Colombe's governess to that of Comtesse d'Orbec's *dame de compagnie.*

Meanwhile the provost and the count were beginning their tour of inspection of the Grand-Nesle, as Dame Perrine and Ascanio had done an hour earlier.

Curious results would follow if walls, which are commonly supposed to have ears, had also eyes and a tongue, and could repeat to those who enter what they have seen and heard on the part of those who have gone before.

But as the walls held their peace, and simply looked at the provost and the treasurer, laughing perhaps, after the manner of walls, it was the treasurer who spoke.

"On my word," he said, as they crossed the courtyard leading from the Petit to the Grand-Nesle, "on my word, the little one will do very well; she is just such a

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woman as I need, my dear D'Estourville, virtuous, well-bred, and ignorant. When the first storm has passed over, time will straighten out everything, believe me. I know how it is; every little girl dreams of a young, handsome, clever, and wealthy husband. Mon Dieu! I have at least half of the requisite qualities. Few men can say as much, so that's a great point in my favor." Passing from his future wife to the property he was to occupy, and speaking with the same shrill, greedy accent of the one as of the other, "This old Nesle," he continued, "is a magnificent habitation, on my honor! and I congratulate you upon it. We shall be marvellously comfortable here, my wife and I, and my whole treasury. Here we will have our own apartments, there will be my offices, and over yonder the servants' quarters. The place as a whole has been allowed to run to seed. But with the expenditure of a little money, which we will find a way to make his Majesty pay, we will give a good account of ourselves. By the way, D'Estourville, are you perfectly sure of retaining the property? You should take steps to perfect your title to it; so far as I now remember, the king did not give it you, after all."

"He did not give it me, true," replied the provost with a laugh, "but he let me take it, which is much the same thing."

"Very good; but suppose that some other should play you the trick of making a formal request for it from him."

"Ah! such a one would be very ill received, I promise you, when he should come to take possession, and, being sure as I am of Madame d'Etampes's support and yours, I would make him sorely repent his pretensions. No, no, my dear fellow, my mind is at ease, and the Hôtel de Nesle belongs to me as truly as my daughter

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Colombe belongs to you; go, therefore, without fear on that score, and return quickly."

As the provost uttered these words, the truth of which neither he nor his interlocutor had any reason to doubt, a third personage, escorted by Raimbault the gardener, appeared upon the threshold of the door leading from the quadrangular courtyard into the gardens of the Petit-Nesle. It was the Vicomte de Marmagne.

He also was a suitor for Colombe's hand, but by no means a favored one. He was a fair-haired scamp, with a pink face, consequential, insolent, garrulous, forever boasting of his relations with women, who often used him as a cloak for their serious amours, overflowing with pride in his post of secretary to the king, which permitted him to approach his Majesty in the same way in which his greyhounds and parrots and monkeys approached him. The provost, therefore, was not deceived by his apparent favor and the superficial familiarity of his relations with his Majesty, which favor and familiarity he owed, so it was said, to his decidedly unmoral additions to the duties of his post. Furthermore, the Vicomte de Marmagne had long since devoured all his patrimony, and had no other fortune than the liberality of François. Now it might happen any day that this liberal disposition would cease, so far as he was concerned, and Messire Robert d'Estourville was not fool enough to rely, in matters of such importance, upon the caprice of a very capricious monarch. He had therefore gently denied the suit of the Vicomte de Marmagne, admitting to him confidentially and under the seal of secrecy that his daughter's hand had long been promised to another. Thanks to this confidential communication, which supplied a motive for the provost's refusal, the Vicomte de Marmagne and Messire Robert d'Estourville had continued to be in ap-

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pearance the best friends in the world, although from that day the viscount detested the provost, and the provost was suspicious of the viscount, who could not succeed in concealing his rancor beneath an affable and smiling exterior from a man so accustomed as Messire Robert to peer into the dark corners of courts, and the deepest depths of men's hearts. So it was that, whenever the viscount made his appearance, the provost expected to find in him, notwithstanding his invariably affable and engaging demeanor, a bearer of bad news, which he would always impart with tears in his eyes, and with the feigned, premeditated grief which squeezes out poison upon a wound, drop by drop.

As for Comte d'Orbec, the Vicomte de Marmagne had wellnigh come to an open rupture with him; it was one of the rare instances of court enmities visible to the naked eye. D'Orbec despised Marmagne, because Marmagne had no fortune and could make no display. Marmagne despised D'Orbec, because D'Orbec was old and had consequently lost the power of making himself agreeable to women; in fine, they mutually detested each other, because, whenever they met upon the same path, one of them had taken something from the other.

So it was that when they met on this occasion the two courtiers greeted each other with that cold, sardonic smile which is never seen save in palace antechambers, and which means, "Ah! if we were n't a pair of cowards, how long ago one of us would have ceased to live!"

Nevertheless, as it is the historian's duty to set down everything, good and bad alike, it is proper to state that they confined themselves to this salutation and this smile, and that Comte d'Orbec, escorted by the provost, and without exchanging a word with Marmagne, left the

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house immediately by the same door by which his enemy entered.

Let us hasten to add, that, notwithstanding the hatred which kept them asunder, these two men were ready, in case of need, to unite temporarily to destroy a third.

Comte d'Orbec having taken his leave, the provost found himself *tête-à-tête* with the Vicomte de Marmagne. He walked toward him with a joyous countenance, in striking contrast to the melancholy visage with which the other awaited him.

"Well, my dear provost," said Marmagne, to open the conversation, "you seem in extremely good spirits."

"While you, my dear Marmagne," rejoined the provost, "seem sadly depressed."

"Simply because, as you know, my poor D'Estourville, my friends' misfortunes afflict me as keenly as my own."

"Yes, yes, I know your heart," said the provost.

"And when I saw you in such a joyous mood, with your future son-in-law, Comte d'Orbec, — for your daughter's betrothal to him is no longer a secret, and I congratulate you upon it, my dear D'Estourville — "

"You know that I told you long ago that Colombe's hand was promised, my dear Marmagne."

"Yes, but, 'pon honor, I cannot understand how you can consent to part from such a fascinating child."

"Oh! I do not propose to part from her," replied Messire Robert. "My son-in-law, Comte d'Orbec, will bring his whole establishment across the Seine, and will take up his abode at the Grand-Nesle, while I shall spend my unoccupied moments at the Petit."

"My poor friend!" exclaimed Marmagne, shaking his head with an air of profound sadness, and placing one hand upon the provost's arm while with the other he wiped away a tear which did not exist.

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"Why 'poor friend'?" demanded Messire Robert. "Come! what have you to tell me now?"

"Am I the first, pray, to tell you the unpleasant news?"

"What is it? Speak out!"

"You know, my dear provost, that we must take things philosophically in this world, and there is an old proverb which we poor weak mortals should keep constantly in mind, for it sums up the accumulated wisdom of all nations."

"What is the proverb? Say what you have to say."

"Man proposes, my dear friend, man proposes, and God disposes."

"In God's name, what have I proposed for him to dispose of? Say on, I beg you, and let us have done with it."

"You have intended the Grand-Nesle for the residence of your daughter and son-in-law?"

"Most assuredly; and I trust that they will be installed there within three months."

"Undeceive yourself, my dear provost, undeceive yourself; the Hôtel de Nesle is no longer your property at this moment. Pardon me for afflicting you thus, but I thought, knowing your somewhat hasty nature, that it would be better for you to learn the news from the mouth of a friend, who would spare your feelings in the telling as much as possible, rather than from some malicious fellow, who would take a keen delight in your misfortune, and brutally cast it in your face. Alas! no, my friend, the Grand-Nesle is yours no longer."

"Who has taken it from me, I pray to know?"

"His Majesty."

"His Majesty!"

"Himself, so you see that the disaster is irreparable."

"When was it done?"

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"This morning. If I had not been detained by my duties at the Louvre, you would have been sooner apprised of it."

"You are mistaken, Marmagne; it's some false report set afloat by my enemies, and which you are in too great haste to repeat."

"I would be glad for many reasons if it were so, but unfortunately I was not told of it; I heard it."

"You heard it? what?"

"I heard the king with his own mouth present the Grand-Nesle to another."

"Who is this other?"

"An Italian adventurer, a paltry goldsmith, whose name you perhaps have heard; an intriguing rascal named Benvenuto Cellini, who came from Florence some two months since, whom the king has taken upon his shoulders for some unknown reason, and to whom he paid a visit to-day with his whole court at the Cardinal of Ferrara's hotel, where this pretended artist has established his studio."

"And you say that you were present, viscount, when the king presented the Grand-Nesle to this wretch?"

"I was," replied Marmagne, pronouncing the words very slowly and distinctly, and dwelling upon them with evident relish.

"Oho!" said the provost, "very good! I am ready for your adventurer: let him come and take possession of his royal gift."

"Do you mean that you would offer resistance?"

"To be sure!"

"To an order of the king?"

"To an order of God or the devil, — to any order, in short, which should undertake to eject me from this place."

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"Softly, provost, softly," said Marmagne, "over and above the king's wrath, to which you expose yourself, this Benvenuto Cellini is in himself more to be feared than you think."

"Do you know who I am, viscount?"

"First of all, he stands very high in his Majesty's good graces, — only for the moment, to be sure, — but it is none the less true."

"Do you know that I, the Provost of Paris, represent his Majesty at the Châtelet, that I sit there beneath a canopy, in a short coat and a cloak with a collar, with my sword at my side, a hat with waving plumes on my head, and in my hand a staff covered with blue velvet?"

"Secondly, I will tell you that this accursed Italian makes no scruple of offering combat, as if he stood on equal terms with them, to princes, cardinals, and popes."

"Do you know that I have a private seal which imparts the fullest authority to those documents to which it is affixed?"

"It is said, furthermore, that the damned bully wounds or kills recklessly every one who ventures to oppose him."

"Do you not know that a body guard of twenty-four men-at-arms is at my orders night and day?"

"They say that he attacked a goldsmith against whom he had a grudge, although he was surrounded by a guard of sixty men."

"You forget that the Hôtel de Nesle is fortified, that the walls are crenellated, and there are machicoulis above the doors, to say nothing of the city fortifications which render it impregnable on one side."

"It is said that he is as thoroughly at home in the science of sieges as Bayard or Antonio de Leyra."

"As to that we shall see."

"I am sorely afraid."

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"I will bide my time."

"Look you, my dear friend, will you allow me to offer you a little advice?"

"Say on, so that it be brief."

"Do not try to struggle with one who is stronger than you."

"Stronger than I, a paltry Italian mechanic! Viscount, you exasperate me!"

"You may find reason to repent, 'pon honor! I speak whereof I know."

"Viscount, you try my temper."

"Consider that the fellow has the king on his side."

"And I have Madame d'Etampes."

"His Majesty may take it ill of you to resist his will."

"I have already done it, Monsieur, and successfully."

"Yes, I know, in the matter of the toll at the bridge of Mantes. But—"

"But what?"

"One risks nothing, or very little at all events, in resisting a weak, good-natured king, while one risks everything in entering into a contest with a powerful, formidable opponent like Benvenuto Cellini."

"By Mahomet's belly, Viscount, do you propose to drive me mad?"

"On the contrary, my purpose is to make you discreet."

"Enough, Viscount, enough! Ah! the villain shall pay dear, I swear, for these moments that your friendship has caused me to pass."

"God grant it, Provost! God grant it!"

"Very good, very good! You have nothing else to tell me?"

"No, no, I believe not," the viscount replied, as if he

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were trying to recall some item of news which would make a fitting pendant to the other.

"Very well, adieu!" cried the provost.

"Adieu, my poor friend!"

"Adieu!"

"At all events I have given you warning."

"Adieu!"

"I shall have no reason to reproach myself: that consoles me."

"Adieu! adieu!"

"Good luck attend you! But I must say that I express that wish with but little hope of its being gratified."

"Adieu! adieu! adieu!"

"Adieu!"

And the Vicomte de Marmagne, sighing as if his heart would burst, and with grief-stricken face, took his departure, gesticulating mournfully, after he had pressed the provost's hand as if he were saying farewell to him forever.

The provost followed him, and with his own hands secured the street door behind him.

It will readily be understood that this friendly conversation had heated Messire d'Estourville's blood and stirred his bile to an extreme degree. He was looking around in search of some one upon whom he might vent his ill-humor, when he suddenly remembered the young man whom he had seen emerging from the Grand-Nesle as he entered with Comte d'Orbec. As Raimbault was at hand he had not far to seek for one who could answer his questions touching that stranger, so he summoned the gardener with one of those imperative gestures which admit no delay, and asked him what he knew about the young man.

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The gardener replied that the individual to whom his master referred had presented himself in the king's name, to inspect the Grand-Nesle; that he did not consider it his duty to take anything upon himself, and therefore referred him to Dame Perrine, who good-naturedly showed him over the whole establishment.

The provost thereupon rushed to the Petit-Nesle to demand an explanation from the worthy duenna, but she unfortunately had just gone out to purchase the weekly supply of provisions.

There remained Colombe, but as the provost could not believe that she had seen the youthful stranger, after the forcible and explicit terms in which he had forbidden Dame Perrine to allow good-looking young men to approach her, he did not even speak to her on the subject.

As his duties required him to return to the Grand-Châtelet, he departed, ordering Raimbault, on pain of instant dismissal, to admit no person to the Grand or Petit-Nesle, whoever he might be, or in whosesoever name he might come, especially the miserable adventurer who had been admitted previously.

So it was that, when Ascanio presented himself on the following day with his wares, in accordance with Dame Perrine's suggestion, Raimbault simply opened a small window, and informed him through the bars that the Hôtel de Nesle was closed to everybody, particularly to him.

Ascanio, as may be imagined, withdrew in despair; but we hasten to say that he did not for a moment attribute this extraordinary reception to Colombe; the maiden had bestowed but one glance upon him, had uttered but one sentence, but that glance was so eloquent of shy affection, and there was such a wealth of loving melody in that one sentence, that it had seemed to Ascanio since

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he parted from her as if an angel's voice were singing in his heart.

He fancied therefore, and with good reason, that, as he had been seen by the provost, the provost was the author of that terrible order of which he was the victim.

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VIII.

PREPARATIONS FOR ATTACK AND DEFENCE.

Ascanio had no sooner returned to the studio on the previous day, and made his report to Benvenuto touching that part of his expedition which related to the topography of the Hôtel de Nesle, than the goldsmith, seeing that it met his requirements in every respect, hastened to the bureau of Seigneur de Neufville, the first secretary of the king's treasury, to obtain from him documentary evidence of the royal gift. Seigneur de Neufville demanded until the following day to assure himself of the validity of Master Benvenuto's claims, and, although the latter considered him extremely impertinent to refuse to take his word for it, he realized the reasonableness of the demand, and assented, resolved however not to allow Messire de Neufville a half-hour's grace on the following day.

He was punctual to the minute, and was at once admitted to the secretary's presence, which he considered a favorable augury.

"Well, Monseigneur," he said, "is the Italian a liar, or did he tell you the truth?"

"The whole truth, my dear friend."

"That is very fortunate."

"And the king has ordered me to hand you a deed of gift in proper form."

"It will be welcome."

"And yet —" continued the secretary, hesitatingly.

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"Well, what more is there? Let us hear."

"And yet if you would allow me to offer you some good advice —"

"Good advice! the devil! that 's a rare article, Monsieur le Secrétaire; say on, say on."

"I should advise you to seek another location for your studio than the Grand-Nesle."

"Indeed!" retorted Benvenuto dryly; "think you that it is not a convenient location?"

"It is, indeed; and truth compels me to state that you would have great difficulty in finding a better."

"Very well, what is the matter then?"

"That it belongs to a personage of too much importance for you to come in collision with him without danger."

"I myself belong to the noble King of France," rejoined Cellini, "and I shall never flinch so long as I act in his name."

"Very good, but in our country, Master Benvenuto, every nobleman is king in his own house, and in seeking to eject the provost from the house which he occupies you risk your life."

"We must all die sooner or later," was Cellini's sententious reply.

"You are determined, then —"

"To kill the devil before the devil kills me. Trust me for that, Monsieur le Secrétaire. Let the provost look well to himself, as all those must do who assume to oppose the king's wishes, especially when Master Benvenuto Cellini has it in charge to carry them out."

Thereupon Messire Nicolas de Neufville made an end of his philanthropic observations, but alleged all sorts of formalities to be complied with before delivering the deed. But Benvenuto tranquilly seated himself, declar-

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ing that he would not stir until the document was placed in his hands, and that he was determined to stay the night there, if necessary, having foreseen that possibility, and taken the precaution to say to his people that he might not return.

Taking note of this determination, Messire Nicolas de Neufville, regardless of consequences, delivered the deed of gift to Benvenuto Cellini, taking pains, however, to advise Messire Robert d'Estourville of what he had been compelled to do, in part by the king's will, in part by the goldsmith's persistence.

Benvenuto returned to his domicile without saying anything to anybody of what he had done, locked up the deed in the drawer in which he kept his precious stones, and calmly resumed his work.

The information transmitted to the provost by the secretary convinced Messire Robert that Benvenuto, as the Vicomte de Marmagne had said that he would do, persisted in his purpose to take possession of the Hôtel de Nesle, peaceably or by force. The provost, therefore, prepared to maintain his rights, sent for his twenty-four sergeants-at-arms, posted sentinels upon the walls, and went to the Châtelet only when the duties of his office absolutely compelled him to do so.

Days passed, however, and Cellini, tranquilly occupied with the work he had in hand, made not the least demonstration. But the provost felt certain that this apparent tranquillity was only a ruse, and that his foe proposed to wait until he had grown weary of watching, and then take him unawares. And so Messire Robert, with eyes and ears always on the alert, his mind always in a state of extreme tension, and engrossed with warlike thoughts, was finally reduced by this condition of affairs, which was neither peace nor war, to a state of feverish

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expectation and anxiety, which threatened, if it were prolonged, to make him as mad as the governor of the Castle of San Angelo. He could not eat or sleep, and grew perceptibly thinner.

From time to time he would abruptly draw his sword and begin to make passes at a wall, shouting: —

"Let him come on! let him come on, the villain! Let him come on, I am ready for him!"

But Benvenuto did not come on.

D'Estourville had his calmer moments, too, during which he would succeed in persuading himself that the goldsmith's tongue was longer than his sword, and that he would never dare to carry out his damnable schemes. It was at one of these moments that Colombe, happening to come out of her room, observed all the warlike preparations, and asked her father what was the occasion of them.

"A scoundrel to be chastised, that 's all," the provost replied.

As it was the provost's business to chastise, Colombe did not even ask who the scoundrel was whose chastisement was preparing, being too deeply preoccupied with her own thoughts not to be content with this brief explanation.

In very truth, Messire Robert with a single word had made a fearful change in his daughter's life; that life, hitherto so calm, so simple, so obscure and secluded, that life of peaceful days and tranquil nights, was like a lake whose surface is suddenly ruffled by a tempest. She had felt at times before that her soul was sleeping, that her heart was empty, but she thought that her solitude was the cause of her melancholy, and attributed the emptiness of her heart to the fact that she had lost her mother in her infancy. And now, without warning, her

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existence, her thoughts, her heart and her soul were filled to overflowing, but with grief.

Ah! how she then sighed for the days of ignorance and tranquillity, when the commonplace but watchful friendship of Dame Perrine was almost sufficient for her happiness; the days of hope and faith, when she reckoned upon the future as one reckons upon a friend; the days of filial trust and confidence, when she believed in the affection of her father. Alas! her future now was the hateful love of Comte d'Orbec; her father's affection was simply ambition so disguised. Why, instead of being the only inheritor of a noble name and vast fortune, was she not the child of some obscure bourgeois of the city, who would have cared for and cherished her? In that case she might have fallen in with this young artist, in whose speech there was so much to move and fascinate, this handsome Ascanio, who seemed to have such a wealth of happiness and love to bestow.

But when the rapid beating of her heart and her flushed cheeks warned her that the stranger's image had filled her thoughts too long, she condemned herself to the task of banishing the lovely dream, and succeeded in placing before her eyes the desolating reality. Since her father had made known to her his matrimonial plans, she had expressly forbidden Dame Perrine to receive Ascanio, upon one pretext or another, threatening to tell her father everything if she disobeyed; and as the governess, fearing to be accused of complicity with him, had said nothing of the hostile projects of Ascanio's master, poor Colombe believed herself to be well protected in that direction.

It must not be supposed, however, that the sweet-natured child was resigned to the idea of obeying her father's commands. No; her whole being revolted at

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the thought of an alliance with this man, whom she would have hated had she really known what hate was. Beneath her beautiful, pale brow she revolved a thousand thoughts, hitherto unknown to her mind, — thoughts of revolt and rebellion, which she looked upon almost as crimes, and for which she asked God's forgiveness upon her knees. Then it occurred to her to go and throw herself at the king's feet. But she had heard it whispered that the same idea had occurred to Diane de Poitiers under much more terrible circumstances, and that she left her honor there. Madame d'Etampes might protect her too, if she chose. But would she choose? Would she not greet the complaints of a mere child with a contemptuous smile? Such a smile of mockery and contempt she had seen upon her father's lips when she begged him to keep her with him, and it made a terrible impression upon her.

Thus Colombe had no refuge but God: and she knelt before her *prie-Dieu* a hundred times a day, imploring the Omnipotent to send succor to her weakness before the end of the three months which still separated her from her formidable *fiancé*, or, if she could hope for no relief on earth, to allow her at least to join her mother in heaven.

Ascanio's existence, meanwhile, was no less troublous and unhappy than that of his beloved. Twenty times since Raimbault had made known to him the order which forbade his admission to the Hôtel de Nesle had he loitered dreaming about the lofty walls which separated him from his life, — in the morning before anybody had risen, and at night after everybody was asleep. But not once, either openly or furtively, did he try to make his way into the forbidden garden. He still had that virginal respect of early youth, which protects the woman

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whom one loves against the very passion which she may have to fear at a later period.

But this did not prevent Ascanio, as he worked away at his carving and chasing, from indulging in many an extravagant dream, to say nothing of those he dreamed in his morning and evening promenades, or during his troubled sleep at night. These dreams were concerned more especially with the day, at first so much dreaded, now so eagerly desired by him, when Benvenuto should assume possession of the Hôtel de Nesle; for Ascanio knew his master, and that all this apparent tranquillity was that of a volcano breeding an eruption. Cellini had given out that the eruption would take place on the following Sunday. Ascanio had no doubt, therefore, that on the following Sunday Cellini's undertaking would be accomplished.

But so far as he was able to judge in his walks around the Séjour de Nesle, the undertaking would not be accomplished without some difficulty, thanks to the guard which was constantly maintained upon the walls; and Ascanio had observed about the hotel all the indications of a fortified post. If there should be an attack, there would be a defence; and as the fortress seemed little disposed to capitulate, it was clear that it must be taken by assault. It was at that decisive moment that Ascanio's chivalrous nature might expect to find an opportunity to display itself. There would be a battle, there would be a breach in the walls to carry, and perhaps there would be a conflagration. Ah! something of that sort was what he longed for! a conflagration most of all, — a conflagration whereby Colombe's life would be endangered! Then he would dart up the tottering staircases, among the burning rafters, and over the crumbling walls. He would hear her voice calling for help; he

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would seek her out, take her in his arms, dying and almost unconscious, and bear her away to safety through the roaring sea of flame, her heart against his, and inhaling her breath. Then, having brought her safely through a thousand dangers, he would lay her at the feet of her despairing father, who would reward his gallant conduct by giving her to the man who had saved her life. Or else, as he bore her in his arms over a frail plank thrown across the flaming chasm, his foot would slip, and they would fall together and die in each other's arms, their hearts blending in one last sigh, in a first and last kiss. This latter alternative was not to be despised by one who had so little hope in his heart as Ascanio; for next to the felicity of living for each other, the greatest happiness is to die together.

Thus it will be seen that all our friends were passing through some very agitated days and nights, with the exception of Benvenuto Cellini, who seemed entirely to have forgotten his hostile designs upon the Hôtel de Nesle, and of Scozzone, who knew nothing of them.

The whole week passed away thus, and Benvenuto Cellini, having worked conscientiously throughout the six days that composed it, and having almost completed the clay model of his Jupiter, donned his coat of mail on the Saturday about five o'clock, buttoned his doublet over it, and, bidding Ascanio accompany him, bent his steps toward the Hôtel de Nesle. When they reached the spot, Cellini made the circuit of the walls, spying out the weak spots, and meditating his plan of siege.

The attack offered more than one difficulty, as the provost had said to his friend Marmagne, as Ascanio had informed his master, and as Benvenuto was now able to see for himself. The Château de Nesle was crenellated and machicolated, was defended by a double wall on the

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river side, and furthermore by the city moats and ramparts on the side of the Pré-aux-Clercs. It was one of those massive and imposing feudal structures, which were equal to the task of defending themselves by their mass alone, provided that the doors were securely fastened, and of repelling without outside assistance the assaults of *tirelaines* and *larroneurs*, as they were called in those days, or of the king's men, if need were. This was often the case at that interesting epoch, when one was generally compelled to do police duty for himself.

Having made his reconnoissance according to all the ancient and modern rules of strategy, and deeming it to be his duty to summon the place to surrender before laying siege to it, he knocked at the little door by which Ascanio had once entered. For him as for Ascanio the small window opened; but it was the martial countenance of an archer, instead of that of the pacific gardener, which appeared in the opening.

"What do you want?" the archer demanded of the stranger who dared to knock at the door of the Hôtel de Nesle.

"To take possession of the hotel, which has been given to me, Benvenuto Cellini," replied the goldsmith.

"Very good, — wait," rejoined the fellow, and he went at once to notify Messire d'Estourville, as he had been ordered to do.

A moment later he returned, accompanied by the provost, who did not show himself, but stood listening, with bated breath, in a corner, surrounded by part of his garrison, in order to judge the better of the gravity of the affair.

"We do not know what you mean," said the archer.

"If that be so," said Cellini, "hand this document to Messire le Prévôt; it is a certified copy of the deed

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of gift." And he passed the parchment through the window.

The sergeant disappeared a second time; but as he had simply to put out his hand to hand the copy to the provost, the window opened again almost immediately.

"Here is his answer," said the sergeant, passing through the bars the parchment torn in pieces.

"Very good," rejoined Cellini with perfect tranquillity. "*Au revoir.*"

He returned to his studio, highly gratified by the attention with which Ascanio had followed his scrutiny of the place, and the young man's judicious suggestions as to the *coup de main* they were to attempt at some time; and he assured his pupil that he would have made a distinguished general, were it not that he was destined to become a still more distinguished artist, which, in Cellini's view, was infinitely preferable.

The next morning the sun rose in all his glory; Benvenuto had requested his workmen to come to the studio, although it was Sunday, and not one of them failed to appear.

"My children," said the master, "it is undoubtedly true that I engaged you to work at the goldsmith's trade, and not to fight. But during the two months that we have been together we have learned to know one another so well that, in a serious emergency, I feel that I can count upon you, as you all and always can count upon me. You know what I have in contemplation: we are but poorly accommodated here, with but little air and little space, and our elbows are too cramped to allow us to undertake great works, or even to use the forge with any degree of vigor. The king, in the presence of you all, deigned to bestow upon me a larger and more commodious abode; but, as he has no leisure to bestow upon

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trifling details, he left it to me to install myself therein. Now, the present possessor does not choose to give over to me this property which his Majesty has so generously presented to me; therefore we must take it. The Provost of Paris, who retains possession in the face of his Majesty's order, (it would seem that such things are of common occurrence in this land,) does not know the man with whom he has to do; as soon as I am refused, I demand; as soon as I am resisted, I take by force. Are you disposed to assist me? I do not conceal from you that there will be danger in so doing: there is a battle to be fought, there are walls to be scaled, and other harmless amusements to be indulged in. There is nothing to fear from the police or the patrol, because we act by his Majesty's authority; but it may mean death, my children. Therefore, let those who wish to go elsewhere do so without hesitation, let those who wish to remain here not be ashamed to say as much; I ask for none but bold and resolute hearts. If you leave me to go alone with Pagolo and Ascanio, have no fear on our behalf. I know not how I shall go to work; but I do know this, that I will not be disappointed for that. But, by the blood of Christ! if you lend me your hearts and your arms, as I hope you will, woe to the provost and the provostry. Now that you are fully instructed in the matter, speak: will you follow me?"

They all shouted with one voice: —

"Anywhere, master; wherever you choose to lead us!"

"Bravo, my children! Then you are all in for the sport?"

"All!"

"Then let the tempest howl!" cried Benvenuto; "at last we are to have a little diversion. I have been rusty long enough. Up, up, brave hearts and swords! Ah!

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thank God! we are soon to give and receive a few lusty blows! Look you, my dear boys, look you, my gallant friends, we must arm ourselves, we must agree upon a plan; let them be ready to look to themselves, and *vive la joie!* I will give you all that I possess in the way of weapons, offensive and defensive, in addition to those that are hanging on the wall, where every one can choose at will. Ah! what we really need is a good culverin: but there's its value in arquebuses, hackbuts, pikes, swords, and daggers; and there are coats of mail galore, and cuirasses and helmets. Come, haste, haste, and let us dress for the ball! the provost shall pay for the music!"

"Hurrah!" cried all his companions.

Thereupon the studio was the scene of a commotion, a tumult, wonderful to look upon; the verve and enthusiasm of the master infected every heart and every face. They tried on cuirasses, brandished swords, tested the point of daggers, laughed and sang, as if a masquerade or festival of some sort were in progress. Benvenuto ran hither and thither, handing a boot to this one, buckling the belt of another, and feeling the blood course hotly and freely through his veins, as if this were the life he truly loved.

The workmen meanwhile indulged in jokes at one another's expense, commenting freely upon the bellicose demeanor and awkward attitudes of their fellows.

"Look, master!" cried one of them; "look at Simon-le-Gaucher,[1] putting his sword on the same side as we! On the right, man! on the right!"

"See Jehan," retorted Simon, "holding his halberd as he'll hold his cross when he's a bishop!"

"There's Pagolo putting on a double coat of mail!" said Jehan.

[1] Left-handed.

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"Why not?" replied Pagolo. "Hermann the German is arraying himself like a knight in the days of the Emperor Barbarossa!"

In fact, the youth referred to by the appellation of Hermann the German (a somewhat pleonastic title, as his name alone was so distinctively Germanic in sound as to indicate that its owner belonged to some one of the circles of the Holy Empire), — Hermann, we say, had covered himself from head to foot with iron, and resembled one of the gigantic statues which the sculptors of that artistic age were accustomed to carve upon tombs.

Benvenuto, although the physical strength of this redoubtable comrade from beyond the Rhine had become proverbial in the studio, remarked that he would be likely to experience some difficulty in moving, being so completely encased, and that his usefulness would certainly be lessened rather than increased. Hermann's only reply was to leap upon a table as lightly as if he were clad in velvet, take down an enormous hammer, wave it around his head, and strike the anvil three such terrific blows that each of them drove it an inch into the ground. There was nothing to say to such a reply; so Benvenuto waved his hand and nodded his head respectfully in token of satisfaction.

Ascanio alone made his toilet apart from the others. He could not avoid a feeling of uneasiness as to the results of the enterprise upon which they were about to embark; for it might well be that Colombe would not forgive him for attacking her father, especially if the struggle should lead to some grave catastrophe, and he would find himself farther removed from her heart, although nearer to her eyes.

Scozzone, half joyous, half anxious, wept one moment and laughed the next. The change of location and the

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prospect of a battle were by no means unpleasing to her, but as for blows and wounds, that was another matter; the preparations for the combat made the frolicsome creature dance for joy, but its possible results made the woman that was in her tremble.

Benvenuto at last noticed her, smiling and weeping at the same time, and he went to her side.

"Thou wilt remain here, Scozzone, with Ruperta," he said, "and prepare lint for the wounded, and a good dinner for those who come safely through it."

"Oh no, no!" cried Scozzone; "oh pray let me go with you! With you I have courage enough to defy the provost and all his myrmidons, but alone here with Ruperta I should die of anxiety and fear."

"Oh, I could never consent to that," replied Benvenuto; "it would trouble me too much to think that some mishap might befall thee. Thou wilt pray for us, dear child, while awaiting our return."

"Listen, Benvenuto," rejoined the maiden, as if struck by a sudden thought, "you understand, of course, that I cannot endure the thought of remaining quiet here while you are fighting yonder, wounded, perhaps dying. But there is a way of satisfying both of us; instead of praying for your safety here in the studio, I will go and pray in the church nearest to the spot. In that way I shall be out of danger, and shall know the result immediately, whether it be a victory or a defeat."

"Very well, so be it," replied Benvenuto; "it is understood, of course, that we shall not go forth to kill others, or to be killed ourselves, without first fulfilling the pious duty of listening to mass. We will go together to the church of the Grands Augustins, which is nearer than any other to the Hôtel de Nesle, and will leave thee there, little one."

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These arrangements determined upon, and the preparations for the affray at an end, they drank a glass of Burgundy to the success of their enterprise. To their weapons, offensive and defensive, they added hammers, tongs, ladders, and ropes, and left the studio, not after the manner of an army corps, but two by two, at sufficiently long intervals not to attract attention. It was not that a *coup de main* was a more unfrequent occurrence in those days than an *émeute* or a change of ministry in these days of ours; but, truth to say, it was not customary to select the Sabbath day, or the hour of noon, for this sort of diversion, and it required all Benvenuto's audacity, reinforced by his consciousness that right was on his side, to venture upon such an undertaking.

One after another our heroes arrived at the Grands Augustins, and, having given their weapons and tools into the charge of the sacristan, who was a friend of Simon-le-Gaucher, they entered the church to listen devoutly to the blessed sacrifice of the mass, and to implore God's help in exterminating as many archers as possible.

Truth compels us to state, however, that despite the gravity of the impending crisis, despite his exemplary piety, and despite the importance of the matters to which his prayers had reference, Benvenuto had no sooner entered the church than his actions indicated that his mind was upon something very different. His distraction was due to the fact that just behind him, but on the other side of the nave, sat a young girl reading from an illuminated missal, — a young girl so adorably lovely that she might well have confused the thoughts of a saint, much more of a sculptor. Under such circumstances the artist sadly interfered with the devotions of the Christian. The gallant Cellini could not resist the desire to have some one to join him in his admiration, and as

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Catherine, who was at his left, would certainly have frowned upon his inattention, he turned to Ascanio, who was at his right, with the purpose of bidding him turn his eyes toward the lovely picture.

But Ascanio's eyes needed no bidding in that direction; from the moment that he entered the church his gaze was riveted upon the maiden, and his eyes never left her face.

Benvenuto, seeing that he was absorbed in contemplation of the same object, simply nudged him with his elbow.

"Yes," said Ascanio; "yes, it is Colombe. O master, is she not beautiful?"

It was indeed Colombe; her father, not anticipating an attack at high noon, had given her permission, not without some reluctance, to go to the Augustins to pray. Colombe, it is true, was very earnest in her request, for it was the only consolation that remained to her. Dame Perrine was by her side.

"Ah çà! who is Colombe?" was Benvenuto's very natural query.

"Ah! yes, you do not know her. Colombe is the daughter of the provost, Messire d'Estourville himself. Is she not beautiful?" he said again.

"No," rejoined Benvenuto, "no, it's not Colombe. 'T is Hebe, Ascanio, the goddess of youth; the Hebe whom my great King François has ordered at my hands; the Hebe of whom I have dreamed, for whom I have prayed to God, and who has come down from above in response to my prayer."

Regardless of the incongruity of the idea of Hebe reading her missal, and pouring out her heart in prayer, Benvenuto continued his hymn to beauty simultaneously with his devotion and his military plans: the goldsmith,

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the Catholic, and the strategist predominated in his mind by turns.

"Our Father who art in heaven — Look, Ascanio, what clean-cut, expressive features! — Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven — How fascinatingly graceful the undulating outline of her figure! — Give us this day our daily bread — And thou sayest that such a lovely child is the daughter of that rascally provost whom I propose to exterminate with my own hand? — And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us — Even though I have to burn down the Hôtel to do it — Amen!"

And Benvenuto crossed himself, having no doubt that he had just concluded a most expressive rendering of the Lord's prayer.

The mass came to an end while he was still absorbed in these heterogeneous ideas, which might seem somewhat profane in the case of a man of different temperament at a different epoch, but which were altogether natural in so reckless a nature as Cellini's, at a time when Clement Marot was putting the seven penitential psalms into gallant verse.

As soon as the *Ite, missa est*, was pronounced, Benvenuto and Catherine exchanged a warm grasp of the hand. Then, while the girl, wiping away a tear, remained on the spot where she was to await the result of the combat, Cellini and Ascanio, their eyes still fixed upon Colombe, who had not once looked up from her book, went with their companions to take a drop of holy water; after which they separated, to meet in a deserted *cul-de-sac* about half-way from the church to the Hôtel de Nesle.

Catherine, in accordance with the prearranged plan, remained to the celebration of high mass, as did Colombe

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and Dame Perrine, who had simply arrived a little early, and had listened to the first service only as a preparation for the more solemn ceremony to follow; nor had they any reason to suspect that Benvenuto and his apprentices were upon the point of cutting all the lines of communication with the house they had so imprudently quitted.

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IX.

THRUST AND PARRY.

THE decisive moment had arrived. Benvenuto divided his men into two detachments: one was to attempt, by every possible means, to force the door of the Hôtel; the other was to cover the operations of the first, and to keep from the walls, with arquebus shots or with their swords, any of the besieged who might appear upon the battlements, or who might attempt a sortie. Benvenuto took command of this last detachment in person, and selected our friend Ascanio for his lieutenant. At the head of the other he placed Hermann, the good-humored, gallant German, who could flatten an iron bar with a hammer, and a man with his fist. He chose for his second in command little Jehan, a rascal of fifteen years, as active as a squirrel, mischievous as a monkey, and impudent as a page, for whom the Goliath had conceived a very deep affection, for the reason, doubtless, that the playful youngster was forever tormenting him. Little Jehan proudly took his place beside his captain, to the great chagrin of Pagolo, who in his double cuirass was not unlike the statue of the Commandeur in the rigidity of his movements.

Having thus made his dispositions, and reviewed his men and inspected their weapons for the last time, Benvenuto addressed a few words to the brave fellows who were about to face danger, perhaps death, in his cause,

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with such good will. Then he grasped each man's hand, crossed himself devoutly, and cried, "Forward!"

The two parties at once took up their line of march, and, skirting the Quai des Augustins, which was deserted at that hour in that spot, they very soon arrived at the Hôtel de Nesle.

Thereupon Benvenuto, unwilling to attack his enemy without first going through all the formalities prescribed by custom in such cases, went forward alone, waving a white handkerchief at the end of his sword, to the same small door as before, and knocked. As before, he was questioned through the barred opening as to the object of his visit. Benvenuto repeated the same formula, saying that he had come to take possession of the château given him by the king. But he was less fortunate than on the former occasion, in that he was not honored with any reply at all.

Thereupon, facing the door, he exclaimed, in loud, distinct tones: —

"To thee, Robert d'Estourville, Provost of Paris, do I, Benvenuto Cellini, goldsmith, sculptor, painter, and engineer, make known that his Majesty François I. has in his good pleasure, as it was his right to do, given to me absolutely the Grand-Nesle. As thou dost insolently maintain thy hold upon it, and, in contravention of the royal will, dost refuse to deliver it to me, I hereby declare to thee, Robert d'Estourville, Seigneur de Villebon, Provost of Paris, that I have come to take possession of the Grand-Nesle by force. Defend thyself therefore, and, if evil comes of thy refusal, know that thou wilt be held answerable therefor on earth and in heaven, before man and before God."

With that Benvenuto paused, and waited; but not a sound came from behind the walls. He thereupon

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loaded his arquebus, and ordered his men to make ready their weapons; then, assembling the leaders Hermann, Ascanio, and Jehan in council, he said to them: —

"You see, my children, that it is not possible to avoid the conflict. Now it is for us to decide in what way we shall begin the attack."

"I will break in the door," said Hermann, "and do you follow me in; that's all."

"With what will you do it, my Samson?" queried Cellini.

Hermann looked about and saw on the quay a piece of timber which four ordinary men would have found it difficult to lift.

"With that beam," he said.

He walked to where it lay, coolly picked it up, placed it under his arm, and fixed it there like a ram in its socket, then returned to his general.

Meanwhile a crowd was beginning to collect, and Benvenuto, excited thereby, was on the point of giving orders for the attack to begin, when the captain of the king's archers, notified doubtless by some conservative citizen, appeared at the corner of the street, accompanied by five or six mounted men. This captain was a friend of the provost, and although he knew perfectly well what was toward, he rode up to Benvenuto, hoping to intimidate him doubtless, and while his people checked Hermann's advance, he said: —

"What is your desire, and why do you thus disturb the peace of the city?"

"The man who really disturbs the peace," replied Cellini, "is he who refuses to obey the king's orders, not he who executes them."

"What do you mean?" inquired the captain.

"I mean that I hold a deed in due form, delivered to

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me by Messire de Neufville, secretary of the royal treasury, wherein his Majesty grants to me the Hôtel du Grand-Nesle. But the people who are in possession refuse to recognize this deed, and thereby keep me from my own. Now in one way or another, I have got it into my head that, since Scripture says that we must render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, Benvenuto Cellini is entitled to take what belongs to Benvenuto Cellini."

"Yes! and instead of preventing us from taking possession of our property, you ought to lend us a hand," cried Pagolo.

"Be silent, rascal," said Benvenuto, stamping angrily; "I have no need of anybody's assistance. Dost thou understand?"

"You are right in theory, but wrong in practice," rejoined the captain.

"How may that be?" demanded Benvenuto, who felt that the blood was beginning to rise in his cheeks.

"You are right to wish to enter into possession of your property, but you are wrong to undertake to do it in this way; for you will not gain much, I promise you, fighting walls with your swords. If I were to give you a little friendly advice, it would be to apply to the officers of justice, and carry your grievance to the Provost of Paris, for example. With that, adieu, and good luck to you!"

And the captain of the king's archers rode away with a sneering laugh, whereupon the crowd laughed too.

"He laughs best who laughs last," said Benvenuto Cellini. "Forward, Hermann, forward!"

Hermann took up his joist once more, and while Cellini, Ascanio, and two or three of the most skilful marksmen of the party, arquebus in hand, stood in readiness to fire upon the wall, he rushed forward like a

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living catapult against the small door, which they deemed to be easier to burst in than the large one.

But when he approached the wall a shower of stones began to rain down upon him, although no defenders could be seen; for the provost had ordered stones to be piled on top of the wall, and it was necessary only to push lightly against the piles to send them down upon the heads of the besiegers.

The latter, being thus warmly received, recoiled a step or two, but, although taken entirely by surprise by this alarming method of defence, no one was wounded save Pagolo; he was so overburdened with his double cuirass that he could not fall back so quickly as the others, and was wounded in the heel.

Hermann himself was no more disturbed by this shower of pebbles than an oak tree by a hail-storm, and kept on to the door, where he at once set to work and began to deal such blows against it that it soon became evident that, stout as it was, it could not long withstand such treatment.

Benvenuto and his men meanwhile stood ready with their arquebuses to fire upon anybody who might appear upon the wall, but no one appeared. The Grand-Nesle seemed to be defended by an invisible garrison, and Benvenuto raged inwardly at his inability to do anything to assist the dauntless German. Suddenly he happened to glance at the old Tour de Nesle, which stood by itself, as we have said, on the other side of the quay, and bathed its feet in the Seine.

"Wait, Hermann," cried Cellini, "wait, my good fellow; the Hôtel de Nesle is ours as surely as my name is Benvenuto Cellini, and I am a goldsmith by trade."

Motioning to Ascanio and his two companions to follow him, he ran to the tower, while Hermann, in obedi-

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ence to his orders, stepped back out of range of the stones, and awaited the fulfilment of the general's promise, leaning upon his timber as a Swiss would lean upon his halberd.

As Benvenuto anticipated, the provost had neglected to station a guard in the old tower, so that he took possession of it unopposed, and, running up the stairs, four at a leap, reached the summit in a moment; the terrace overlooked the walls of the Grand-Nesle, as a steeple overlooks a town, so that the besieged, who a moment before were sheltered by their ramparts, suddenly found themselves entirely unprotected.

The report of an arquebus and the hissing of a bullet, followed by the fall of an archer, warned the provost that the face of affairs was in all probability about to change.

At the same moment Hermann, realizing that he would now have a free field, resumed his joist, and began to batter away again at the door, which the besieged had strengthened somewhat during the momentary suspension of hostilities.

The crowd, with the marvellous instinct of self-possession always noticeable in such bodies, realized that shooting was to form part of the entertainment, and that spectators of the tragedy about to be enacted were likely to be splashed with blood; and they no sooner heard the report of Benvenuto's arquebus and the cry of the wounded archer than they dispersed like a flock of pigeons.

A single individual remained.

This was no other than our friend, Jacques Aubry, the student, who had kept the appointment made the preceding Sunday with Ascanio, in the hope of enjoying his game of tennis.

He had but to cast a glance over the battle-field to understand what was going on.

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It is not difficult to divine the determination arrived at by Jacques Aubry, from what we have already seen of his character. To play at tennis or with fire-arms was equally sport to him; and as he guessed that the besiegers were most likely to be his friends, he enlisted under their banner.

"Well, my boys," he said, walking up to the group which was waiting for the door to be burst in to rush into the citadel, "we are having a bit of a siege, are we? Peste! you 're not attacking a cabin, and it 's a good deal of an undertaking for so few of you to try to take a strong place like this."

"We are not alone," said Pagolo, who was dressing his heel; and he pointed to Benvenuto and his three or four companions, who were keeping up such a well sustained fire upon the wall that the stones were falling much less freely than at first.

"I see, I see, Master Achilles," said Jacques Aubry, "for you are like him in being wounded in the heel, in addition to a thousand other points of similarity, no doubt. I see: yes, there 's my friend Ascanio, and the master doubtless, on top of the tower yonder."

"Very true," said Pagolo.

"And that fellow banging away at the door so lustily is one of you also, is n't he?"

"That 's Hermann," said little Jehan proudly.

"Peste! how he goes on!" said the student. "I must go and congratulate him."

He sauntered along with his hands in his pockets, regardless of the bullets whistling above his head, to the brave German, who kept at his task with the regularity of a machine.

"Do you need anything, my dear Goliath?" said Jacques Aubry. "I am at your service."

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"I am thirsty," replied Hermann, without pausing in his work.

"Peste! I can well believe it; that's thirsty work you're doing there, and I wish I had a cask of beer to offer you."

"Water!" said Hermann, "water!"

"Do you mean that that mild beverage will satisfy you? So be it. The river is at hand, and you shall be served in a moment."

Jacques ran to the river, filled his helmet with water, and took it to the German. He leaned his beam against the wall, swallowed at a draught all that the helmet contained, and handed it back to the student empty.

"Thanks," he said, and, taking up the beam once more, he resumed his work.

An instant later he said, "Go and tell the master to be in readiness, for we are getting on famously here."

Jacques Aubry started for the tower, and in a very few moments he stood between Ascanio and Benvenuto, who were keeping up such a brisk and effective fire that they had already shot down two or three men, and the provost's archers were beginning to think twice before showing themselves upon the walls.

Meanwhile, as Hermann had sent word to Benvenuto, the door was beginning to yield, and the provost resolved to make one last effort; he cheered on his men to such good purpose that the stones began to rain down once more. But two or three arquebus shots speedily calmed anew the ardor of the besieged, who, despite all Messire Robert's promises and remonstrances, coyly remained out of range. Thereupon Messire Robert himself appeared, alone, carrying in his hands an enormous stone, and made ready to hurl it down upon Hermann's head.

But Benvenuto was not the man to allow his retainer

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to be taken by surprise. As soon as he caught sight of the provost rashly venturing where no one else ventured to go, he put his weapon to his shoulder; it would have been all up with Messire Robert, had not Ascanio, just as Cellini pulled the trigger, thrown up the barrel with a quick motion of his hand accompanied by a sharp exclamation, so that the bullet whistled harmlessly through the air. Ascanio had recognized Colombe's father.

As Benvenuto turned furiously upon him to demand an explanation, the stone, thrown with all the force the provost could impart to it, fell full upon Hermann's helmet. Even the enormous strength of the modern Titan was not equal to the task of sustaining such a blow; he relaxed his hold of the timber, threw out his arms as if seeking something to cling to, and, finding nothing within reach, fell to the ground unconscious, with a terrible crash.

Besieged and besiegers simultaneously set up a shout. Little Jehan and three or four comrades who were near Hermann ran to him to carry him away from the wall, and look to his injuries; but the large and small doors of the Hôtel de Nesle opened at the same moment, and the provost, at the head of twelve or fifteen men, darted upon the wounded man, cutting and slashing vigorously, as did all his followers, so that Jehan and his comrades were forced to retreat, although Benvenuto was shouting to them to hold their ground, and that he would come and help them. The provost seized the opportunity; eight of his men lifted Hermann, who was still unconscious, by the arms and legs, and seven took up a position to protect their retreat, so that, while Cellini, Ascanio, and their three or four comrades on the terrace of the tower were hurrying down the four or five flights of stairs which lay between them and the street, Her-

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mann and his bearers re-entered the Grand-Nesle. When Cellini, arquebus in hand, appeared at the door of the tower, the door of the Hôtel was just closing behind the last of the provost's men-at-arms.

There was no disguising the fact that this was a check, and a serious check at that. Cellini, Ascanio, and their comrades had, it is true, disabled three or four of the besieged, but the loss of these three or four men was much less disastrous to the provost, than was the loss of Hermann to Cellini.

The besiegers were dazed for a moment.

Suddenly Ascanio and Cellini looked at each other, as if by a common impulse.

"I have a plan," said Cellini, looking to the left, that is to say, toward the city.

"And so have I," Ascanio rejoined, looking to the right, that is to say, toward the fields.

"I have devised a plan to bring the garrison out of the castle."

"And I a plan to open the door for you, if you do bring them out."

"How many men do you need?"

"A single one will suffice."

"Choose."

"Will you come with me, Jacques Aubry?' said Ascanio.

"To the end of the world, my dear fellow, to the end of the world. But I should n't be sorry to have some sort of a weapon, the end of a sword for instance, or a suspicion of a dagger — four or five inches of steel to feel my way with if occasion requires."

"Oh, take Pagolo's sword," said Ascanio; "he can't use it, for he 's nursing his heel with his right hand and crossing himself with the other."

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"And here's my own dagger to complete your outfit," said Cellini. "Strike with it all you please, young man, but do not leave it in the wound; it would be altogether too handsome a present to the wounded man, for the hilt was carved by myself, and is worth a hundred golden crowns, if it is worth a sou."

"And the blade?" queried Jacques Aubry. "The hilt is very valuable, no doubt, but at such a time the blade is of the greatest importance to my mind."

"The blade is priceless," rejoined Benvenuto; "with it I killed my brother's murderer."

"Bravo!" cried the student. "Come, Ascanio, let's be off."

"I am ready," said Ascanio, winding five or six lengths of rope around his body, and putting one of the ladders over his shoulder, — "I am ready."

The two venturesome youths walked along the quay a hundred yards or thereabouts, then turned to the left, and disappeared around the corner of the wall of the Grand-Nesle, behind the city moat.

Let us leave Ascanio to carry out his scheme, and follow Cellini in the development of his.

The objects upon which his eyes rested, when, as we have said, he looked toward the left, that is, in the direction of the city, were two women, standing amid a group of timid spectators at some little distance, — two women, in whom he thought he recognized the provost's daughter and her governess.

They were in fact Colombe and Dame Perrine, who, after hearing mass, set out to return to the Petit-Nesle, and had come to a stand-still in the crowd, trembling with alarm on account of what they had heard of the siege that was in progress, and of what they saw with their own eyes.

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But Colombe no sooner perceived that there was a momentary cessation of hostilities, which left the road open for her, than, heedless of the entreaties of Dame Perrine, who begged her not to risk her safety in the tumult, she went forward resolutely, impelled by her anxiety for her father, and leaving Dame Perrine entirely free to follow her or to remain where she was. As the duenna was really deeply attached to her charge, she determined to accompany her, notwithstanding her fright.

They left the group just as Ascanio and Jacques Aubry turned the corner of the wall.

Now Benvenuto Cellini's plan may be divined.

As soon as he saw the two women coming toward him, he himself stepped forward to meet them, and gallantly offered his arm to Colombe.

"Have no fear, madame," he said; "if you will deign to accept my arm I will escort you to your father."

Colombe hesitated, but Dame Perrine seized the arm on her side which Benvenuto had forgotten to offer her.

"Take his arm, my dear, take it," she said, "and let us accept this noble knight's protection. Look, look! there is Monsieur le Prévôt, leaning over the wall: he is anxious about us, no doubt."

Colombe took Benvenuto's arm, and the three walked to within a step or two of the door.

There Cellini stopped, and said to the provost in a loud voice, making sure that Colombe's arm and Dame Perrine's were safely within his own: —

"Monsieur le Prévôt, your daughter who is here desires to enter; I trust that you will open the door to her, unless you prefer to leave so charming a hostage in your enemy's hands."

Twenty times within two hours the provost, behind his ramparts, had thought of his daughter, whom he had so

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imprudently allowed to go out, being in considerable doubt as to the possibility of admitting her again. He was hoping that she would be warned in time, and would be wise enough to go to the Grand-Châtelet and await results, when he saw Cellini leave his companions and go to meet two women, in whom he recognized Colombe and Dame Perrine.

"The little fool!" he muttered beneath his breath; "but I can't leave her in the midst of these miscreants."

He opened the wicket, and showed his face behind the grating.

"Well," said he, "what are your terms?"

"These," said Benvenuto. "I will allow Madame Colombe and her governess to enter, but only on condition that you come forth with all your men, and we will then decide our dispute by a fair fight in the open. They who remain in possession of the battle-field shall have the Hôtel de Nesle; '*Væ victis!*' as your compatriot Brennus said."

"I accept," said the provost, "on one condition."

"What is it?"

"That you and your people stand back to give my daughter time to come in and my archers time to go out."

"Agreed," said Cellini; "but do you come out first, and let Madame Colombe go in afterward; when she is safely inside, you will throw the key over the wall to her, and thus leave yourself no opportunity to retreat."

"Agreed," said the provost.

"Your word?"

"On the faith of a gentleman. And yours?"

"On the faith of Benvenuto Cellini."

These terms being agreed upon, the door opened, and the provost's retainers filed out, and drew up in two rows before the door, Messire d'Estourville at their head.

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They were nineteen in all. On the other side, Benvenuto, without Ascanio, Hermann, and Jacques Aubry, had but eight men remaining, and of these Simon-le-Gaucher was wounded, — luckily in the right hand. But Benvenuto was not given to counting his foes; it will be remembered that he did not hesitate to attack Pompeo single-handed, although he was attended by a dozen sbirri. He was only too glad, therefore, to abide by his agreement, for he desired nothing so much as a general and decisive action.

"You may go in now, madame," he said to his fair prisoner.

Colombe flew across the space which lay between the two camps as swiftly as the bird whose name she bore, and threw herself panting into the provost's arms.

"Father! father!" she cried, weeping, "in Heaven's name, do not expose yourself!"

"Go inside!" said the provost sharply, taking her by the arm, and leading her to the door; "'tis your folly that reduces us to this extremity."

Colombe passed through the door, followed by Dame Perrine, to whom fear had lent, if not wings, as to her lovely ward, at least legs, which she thought she had lost ten years before.

The provost closed the door behind them.

"The key! the key!" cried Cellini.

True to his promise, the provost took the key from the lock and threw it over the wall, so that it fell into the courtyard.

"And now," cried Benvenuto, rushing upon the provost and his troop, "every man for himself, and God for us all!"

A terrible struggle ensued, for before the provost's people had time to lower their weapons and fire, Ben-

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venuto with his seven workmen was in their midst, slashing to right and left with the terrible sword which he handled in such masterly fashion, and which, forged by his own hand, met few coats of mail or breastplates able to resist it. The soldiers thereupon cast aside their useless arquebuses, drew their swords, and began to cut and thrust in return. But, despite their numbers and their gallantry, in less time than it takes to write the words, they were scattered all about the square, and two or three of the bravest, wounded so severely that they could fight no longer, were forced to fall back.

The provost saw the danger, and being a brave man, who in his time had achieved some fame as a fighting man, he rushed forward to confront this redoubtable Benvenuto Cellini, whom nobody seemed able to withstand.

"To me!" he cried; "to me, infamous robber! and let us decide the affair! What say you?"

"Oh! I could ask nothing better," replied Benvenuto. "If you will bid your people not to interfere with us, I am your man."

"Stand where you are!" said the provost to his men.

"Let not one of you stir!" said Cellini to his.

And the combatants on either side stood rooted in their places, silent and motionless, like the Homeric warriors, who ceased their own fighting in order to miss no part of a contest between two renowned chiefs.

Thereupon the provost and Cellini, each of whom already held his naked sword in his hand, attacked each other at the same instant.

The provost was a clever fencer, but Cellini's skill in that direction was of the very first order. For ten or twelve years past the provost had not once had occasion to draw his sword. On the other hand, during those same ten or twelve years hardly a day had passed that

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Benvenuto had not had or made an occasion to draw his. At the outset, therefore, the provost, who had counted a little too much upon his own prowess, became conscious of his enemy's superiority.

Cellini, for his part, meeting with a resistance which he hardly anticipated from a man of the robe, exerted all the energy, activity, and cunning of which he was capable. It was a marvellous thing to watch his sword, which, like the triple sting of a serpent, threatened the head and the heart at the same instant, flying from place to place, and hardly giving his adversary time to parry, much less to make a single thrust. And so the provost, realizing that he had to do with one stronger than himself, began to give ground, still defending himself, however. Unluckily for Messire Robert, his back was toward the wall, so that a very few steps brought him up against the door, for which he instinctively aimed, although he was well aware that he had thrown the key over the wall.

When he reached that point he felt that he was lost, and like a wild boar at bay, he summoned all his strength, and delivered three or four lusty blows in such rapid succession that it was Benvenuto's turn to parry: once indeed he was a second too late, and his adversary's blade grazed his breast, despite the excellent coat of mail he wore. But, like a wounded lion bent upon speedy vengeance, Benvenuto, the moment that he felt the sharp point of the sword, gathered himself for a spring, and would have run the provost through with a deadly lunge, had not the door behind him suddenly given way at that moment, so that Messire d'Estourville fell over backwards, and the sword came in contact with the individual who had saved him by opening the door so unexpectedly.

But the result was different from what might have

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been expected, for the wounded man said nothing, while Benvenuto gave utterance to a terrible cry. He had recognized Ascanio in the man whom he had unintentionally wounded. He had no eyes for Hermann or for Jacques Aubry, who stood behind his victim. Like a madman, he threw his arms around the young man's neck, seeking the wound with his eyes and his hand and his mouth, and crying: —

"Slain, slain, slain by my hand! Ascanio, my child, I have killed thee!" and roaring and weeping, as lions roar and weep.

Meanwhile Hermann extricated the provost, unharmed, from between Ascanio's and Cellini's legs, and, taking him under his arm as he might have done with a baby, deposited him in a little house where Raimbault kept his gardening tools. He locked the door upon him, drew his sword, and assumed a posture indicative of his purpose to defend his prisoner against any one who might undertake to recapture him.

Jacques Aubry made but one bound from the pavement to the top of the wall, brandishing his dagger triumphantly, and shouting: "Blow, trumpets, blow! the Grand-Nesle is ours!"

How all these surprising things had come to pass the reader will discover in the following chapter.

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mine, a priest, evoked for me at the Coliseum. Indeed, we had much ado to rid ourselves of them. But the dread souvenir of those infernal apparitions was forever banished from my mind when, in answer to my fervent prayer, the blessed Saviour of mankind appeared to me, in a flood of sunlight, crowned with glory, and brought sweet consolation to me in the misery of my captivity."

"And are you sure beyond a peradventure," demanded the Queen of Navarre, "so sure that you have no shadow of doubt, that Christ really appeared to you?"

"I have no doubt of it, madame."

"In that case, Benvenuto, go on and fashion a Christ for our chapel," said François I., with his usual good humor.

"Sire, if your Majesty will so far indulge me, I pray you to order something different, and allow me to postpone the execution of that work."

"Why so?"

"Because I promised God to undertake it for no other sovereign than Him."

"*A la bonne heure!* Be it so! Benvenuto, I need twelve candlesticks for my table."

"Ah! that is a different matter; and therein, Sire, you shall be obeyed."

"It is my wish that they should take the form of twelve silver statues."

"The effect will be magnificent, Sire."

"They must represent six gods and six goddesses, and be of my own height."

"Why, your order is for a whole epic poem," said the Duchesse d'Etampes; "for a work of marvellous, surprising splendor, is it not, Monsieur Benvenuto?"

"I am never surprised, madame."

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"I should be greatly surprised, myself," retorted the duchess, somewhat piqued, "if other sculptors than those of the olden time could carry such a task to completion."

"I hope, nevertheless, to execute it as satisfactorily as they could have done," rejoined Benvenuto, coolly.

"Oho! are you not inclined to boast a little, Monsieur Benvenuto?"

"I never boast, madame."

As he made this reply with perfect calmness, Cellini looked at Madame d'Etampes, and the haughty duchess lowered her eyes, in spite of herself, under that firm, assured glance, in which there was no trace of irritation. Her resentment was aroused by the consciousness of his superiority, to which she yielded even while resisting it, and without knowing in what it consisted. She had thought hitherto that beauty was the greatest power in the world; she had forgotten genius.

"What treasure," said she, with a bitter sneer, "would suffice to recompense such talent as yours?"

"None that I can command, i' faith," rejoined François I., "and apropos, Benvenuto, I remember that you have as yet received but five hundred crowns. Will you be content with the stipend which I allowed my painter, Leonardo da Vinci, seven hundred gold crowns yearly? I will pay over and above that for all works which you may execute for me."

"Sire, your offer is worthy such a king as François I., and — I venture to say it — of such an artist as Cellini. And yet I shall make so bold as to prefer a request to your Majesty."

"It is granted in advance, Benvenuto."

"Sire, I am but ill and narrowly accommodated in this edifice. One of my pupils has discovered a location

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much more favorably situated than this for the execution of such great works as my king may choose to command. The property in question belongs to your Majesty; it is the Grand-Nesle. It is at the disposal of the Provost of Paris, but he does not dwell therein; he occupies only the Petit-Nesle, which I will gladly leave in his possession."

"So be it, Benvenuto," said François; "take up your abode at the Grand-Nesle, and I shall have only to cross the river to talk with you and admire your masterpieces."

"Consider, Sire," interposed Madame d'Etampes, "that you thereby, for no motive, deprive a nobleman, and one devoted to my service, of property appertaining to his office.

Benvenuto glanced at her, and for the second time Anne lowered her eyes beneath that steady, piercing gaze. Cellini rejoined, with the same naïve good faith with which he had described the supernatural apparitions: —

"I, too, am of noble birth, madame; my family descends from a gallant officer, who held high rank under Julius Cæsar, — one Fiorino, of Cellino, near Montefiascone, — and who gave his name to Florence; while your provost and his ancestors, if my memory serves me, have never given their name to anything. However," continued Benvenuto, turning to François, and changing his expression and his tone, "it may be that I have made too bold, — it may be that I shall incur the hatred of powerful and influential persons, who, despite your Majesty's protection, may prove too strong for me at last. The Provost of Paris is said to have something very like an army at his orders."

"I have been told," the king interrupted, "that on

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a certain day, at Rome, one Cellini, a goldsmith, retained, in default of payment therefor, a silver vase ordered by Monsieur Farnese, then cardinal, and to-day Pope."

"It is true, Sire."

"Furthermore, that the cardinal's whole household stormed the goldsmith's studio, sword in hand, with the design of carrying away the vase by force."

"That, too, is true."

"But this Cellini, in ambush behind the door, armed with his carbine, did defend himself so valorously that he put Monseigneur le Cardinal's people to flight; and was paid by the cardinal on the following day."

"All that, Sire, is strictly true."

"Very good! are not you the Cellini in question?"

"Yes, Sire; let your Majesty but continue to bestow your favor upon me and nothing has any power to terrify me."

"In that case, go straight before you," said the king, smiling in his beard; "go where you will, since you are of noble blood."

Madame d'Etampes said no more, but she registered a mental vow of deadly hatred to Cellini from that moment, — the hatred of an offended woman.

"One last favor, Sire," said Cellini. "I cannot present all my workmen to you; they are ten in number, some French, some German, all worthy, talented comrades. But here are my two pupils whom I brought from Italy with me, Pagolo and Ascanio. Come forward, Pagolo, and raise your head and your eyes a little; not impertinently, but like an honest man who has no evil action to blush for. This good fellow lacks inventive genius perhaps, Sire, and is slightly lacking in earnestness, too; but he is a careful, conscientious

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artist, who works slowly, but well, who comprehends my ideas perfectly, and executes them faithfully. And this is Ascanio, my noble-hearted, amiable pupil, and my beloved child. It is doubtless true that he has not the vigorous creative faculty which will represent in a bas-relief the serried ranks of two hostile armies meeting in deadly encounter, and tearing each other to pieces, or lions and tigers clinging with claws and teeth to the edge of a vase. Nor has he the original fancy which invents horrible chimeras and impossible dragons. No; but his soul, which resembles his body, has the instinct of a divine ideal, so to speak. Ask him to design an angel, or a group of nymphs, and no one can equal the exquisite poesy and grace of his work. With Pagolo I have four arms, with Ascanio I have two souls; and then he loves me, and I am very happy to have always by my side a pure and devoted heart like his."

While his master was speaking, Ascanio stood near him, modestly, but without embarrassment, in an attitude of unstudied grace, and Madame d'Etampes could not remove her eyes from the fascinating young Italian, black-eyed and black-haired, who seemed a living copy of Apollino.

"If Ascanio," said she, "understands grace and beauty so well, and if he cares to come some morning to the Hôtel d'Etampes, I will furnish him with precious stones and gold, with which he may cause some marvellous flower to bloom for me."

Ascanio bowed and thanked her with a glance.

"And I," said the king, "grant to him, as well as to Pagolo, a yearly pension of one hundred crowns."

"I undertake to make them earn their pension, Sire," said Benvenuto.

"But who is the lovely child with the long eye-

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lashes, hiding yonder in the corner?" said François, spying Scozzone for the first time.

"Oh, pay no attention to her, Sire," replied Benvenuto, with a frown; "she is the only one of the beautiful things in this studio whom I like not to have noticed."

"Aha! you are jealous, my Benvenuto."

"Mon Dieu! Sire, I like not that any hand should be laid upon my property; to compare small things with great, it is as if some other should dare to think of Madame d'Etampes; you would be furious, Sire. Scozzone is my duchess."

The duchess, who was gazing at Ascanio, bit her lips at this unceremonious interruption. Many courtiers smiled in spite of themselves, and all the ladies giggled. As for the king, he laughed outright.

"Foi de gentilhomme! your jealousy is within its right, Benvenuto, and an artist and a king may well understand each other. Adieu, my friend: I commend my statues to your attention. You will commence with Jupiter, naturally, and when you have finished the model you will show it to me. Adieu, and good luck! We will meet at the Hôtel de Nesle."

"To bid me show you the model is a simple matter, Sire; but how shall I gain entrance to the Louvre?"

"Your name will be given at the gates, with orders to introduce you to my presence."

Cellini bowed, and with Pagolo and Ascanio, escorted the king and court to the street. At the door he knelt and kissed the king's hand.

"Sire," he said with deep feeling, "you have heretofore saved me from captivity, perhaps from death, through the intervention of Monseigneur de Montluc; you have overwhelmed me with wealth, you have honored my poor

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studio with your presence; but far more than all this, Sire, is the fact, and I know not how to thank you that it is so, that you so magnificently anticipate all my dreams. We ordinarily work only for a chosen few scattered through the centuries, but I shall have had the signal honor of finding a living judge, always present, always enlightened. Until now I have been only the workman of the future; permit me henceforth to call myself your Majesty's goldsmith."

"My workman, my goldsmith, my artist, and my friend, Benvenuto, if the last title seems to you no more deserving of contempt than the others. Adieu, or rather, *au revoir*."

It is needless to say that all the princes and nobles followed the example set by the king, and loaded Cellini with flattery and offers of friendship.

When all were gone, and Benvenuto was left alone in the courtyard with his pupils, they thanked him, Ascanio effusively, Pagolo with something very like constraint.

"Nay, do not thank me, my children, it's not worth while. But look you, if you do in truth consider yourselves under any obligation to me, I wish, since this subject of conversation was introduced to-day, to ask a service at your hands; it relates to something which I have very much at heart. You heard what I said to the king apropos of Catherine, and what I said to him truly expressed the deepest feeling of my heart. The child is necessary to my life, my friends; to my life as an artist, because, as you know, her services as a model are offered so freely and joyously; to my life as a man, because I think that she loves me. I pray you, therefore, although she is beautiful, and although you are young, as she also is, do not let your thoughts rest upon Catherine; there are enough other lovely girls in the world. Do not tear

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my heart, do not insult my affection by casting bold glances upon my Scozzone; nay, rather watch over her in my absence, and advise her as if you were her brothers. I conjure you, observe my wishes herein, for I know myself and my feeling in this matter, and I swear before God, that if I should discover aught amiss, I would kill her and her accomplice."

"Master," said Ascanio, "I respect you as my master, and I love you as my father; have no fear."

"Blessed Jesus!" cried Pagolo, clasping his hands, "may God preserve me from thinking of such an infamous action! Do I not know that I owe everything to you, and would it not be a crime thus to abuse your sacred confidence in me, and to repay your benefactions by such dastardly treachery?"

"Thanks, my friends," said Benvenuto, pressing their hands. "I have perfect faith in you, and I am content. Now, Pagolo, return to your work, for I have promised the seal at which you are working to M. de Villeroi for to-morrow; while Ascanio and myself pay a visit to the estate which our gracious king has bestowed upon us, and of which we will take possession on Sunday next, peaceably or by force."

Then he turned to Ascanio.

"Come, Ascanio," said he, "let us go and see if this Nesle habitation, which seemed to you so eligible in its external aspect, has internal appointments corresponding to its reputation."

Before Ascanio had time to offer any observation, Benvenuto, with a parting glance over the studio to see if every workman was in his place, and a light tap upon Scozzone's plump, rosy cheek, passed his arm through his pupil's, drew him toward the door, and went out with him.

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VI.

TO WHAT USE A DUENNA MAY BE PUT.

THEY had taken hardly ten steps in the street, when they met a man of some fifty years, rather short of stature, but with a handsome, mobile countenance.

"I was about to call upon you, Benvenuto," said the new arrival, whom Ascanio saluted with respect, mingled with veneration, and whose hand Benvenuto cordially grasped.

"Is your business of importance, my dear Francesco?" said the goldsmith. "In that case, I will return with you; or was it for no other purpose than a friendly call? In that case, come with us."

"It was to proffer you some friendly advice, Benvenuto."

"I will gladly listen. Advice is always a good thing to receive when it is proffered by a friend."

"But that which I have to give you is for no other ear than yours."

"This youth is another myself, Francesco; say on."

"I would already have done so, had I thought that I ought to do it," replied Benvenuto's friend.

"Pardon, master," said Ascanio, discreetly moving apart.

"Very well; go alone whither I purposed going with you, dear boy," said Benvenuto; "as you know, when you have seen a thing it is as if I had myself seen it. Look most carefully into every detail: see if the

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studio will have a good light, if the courtyard will be a convenient place for a furnace, and if it will be possible to separate our workshop from that of the other apprentices. Do not forget the tennis-court."

With that Benvenuto passed his arm through the stranger's, waved his hand to Ascanio, and returned to the studio, leaving the young man standing in the middle of Rue Saint-Martin.

In very truth there was in the commission intrusted to him by his master more than enough to embarrass Ascanio. His embarrassment was by no means slight, even when Benvenuto proposed that they should make the visit of inspection in company. Judge, then, what it became when he found himself confronted with the prospect of making it all alone. He had watched Colombe two Sundays without daring to follow her, had followed her on the third without daring to accost her, and now he was to present himself at her home; and for what purpose? To examine the Hôtel de Nesle, which Benvenuto proposed, by way of pastime, to take from Colombe's father on the following Sunday, willy-nilly.

It was a false position for anybody; it was terrible for a lover.

Fortunately it was a long distance from Rue Saint-Martin to the Hôtel de Nesle. Had it been only a step or two, Ascanio would not have taken them; but it was a half-league, so he started.

Nothing so familiarizes one with danger as to be separated from it by a considerable time or distance. To all strong minds and happy dispositions, reflection is a powerful auxiliary. Ascanio belonged to the latter class. In those days it was not fashionable to be disgusted with life before one had fairly entered upon it. All the impulses were ingenuous and ingenuously expressed, — joy

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by laughter, sorrow by tears. Affectation was a thing almost unknown, in life as in art, and a comely youth of twenty was in no wise ashamed in those days to confess that he was happy

But in all Ascanio's embarrassment there was a certain amount of joy. He had not expected to see Colombe again until the following Sunday, and he was to see her that very day. Thus he had gained six days, and six days of waiting are, as everybody knows, six centuries according to a lover's reckoning.

And so, as he approached his destination, the affair became more simple in his eyes. He it was, to be sure, who had advised Benvenuto to ask the king for the Hôtel de Nesle for his studio, but could Colombe take it ill of him that he had desired to be near her? This installation of the Florentine goldsmith in the old palace of Amaury could not, it was true, be carried out without interference with Colombe's father, who looked upon it as his own; but would any real injury be inflicted upon Messire Robert d'Estourville when he did not occupy it? Moreover, there were a thousand ways in which Benvenuto could pay for his occupancy; — a chased cup for the provost, a necklace for his daughter (and Ascanio would undertake to make the necklace), might, and undoubtedly would, in that artistic age, make the rough places smooth. Ascanio had seen grand dukes, kings, and popes ready to give their coronets, sceptres, or tiaras as the price of one of the marvellous examples of his master's art. After all, then, supposing that matters should take that course, Messire Robert would eventually be in Master Benvenuto's debt; for Master Benvenuto was so generous that, if Messire Robert showed a disposition to be courteous and compliant, Ascanio was certain that he, Master Benvenuto, would deal right royally with him.

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By the time he reached the end of Rue Saint-Martin, Ascanio looked upon himself as a messenger of peace, chosen by the Lord to maintain harmonious relations between two powers.

And yet, notwithstanding that conviction, Ascanio was not sorry — surely lovers are strange creatures — to lengthen his journey by ten minutes, and instead of crossing the Seine by boat, he walked the whole length of the quays, and crossed by the Pont aux Moulins. It may be that he chose that road because it was the same he had taken the evening before when following Colombe.

Whatever his motive for making the detour, he finally found himself in front of the Hôtel de Nesle in about twenty minutes.

But when he saw the little ogive door that he must pass through, when he saw the turrets of the lovely little Gothic palace boldly raising their heads above the wall, when he thought that behind those jalousies, half closed because of the heat, was his beautiful Colombe, the whole card-house of happy dreams which he had built on the road vanished like the structures one sees in the clouds, and which the wind overturns with one blow of its wing; he found himself face to face with reality, and reality did not seem to him the most reassuring thing in the world.

However, after a few moments of hesitation — hesitation which is the harder to understand, in that he was absolutely alone upon the quay in the intense heat — he realized that he must make up his mind to do something. As there was nothing for him to do but find his way into the hotel, he walked to the door and raised the knocker. But God only knows when he would have let it fall, had not the door chanced to open at that moment, bringing him face to face with a sort of Master Jacques, a man

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about thirty years of age, half servant, half peasant. It was Messire Robert d'Estourville's gardener.

Ascanio and the gardener mutually recoiled a step.

"What do you want?" said the gardener; "whom do you seek?"

Ascanio, thus compelled to go forward with his mission, summoned all his courage, and replied bravely:—

"I desire to inspect the hotel."

"To inspect the hotel!" cried the gardener in amazement; "in whose name?"

"In the king's name!" Ascanio replied.

"In the king's name!" cried the gardener. "Jesus-Dieu! does the king intend to take it from us?"

"Perhaps so!"

"But what does it mean?"

"Pray understand, my friend," said Ascanio, with a self-possession upon which he mentally congratulated himself, "that I have no explanation to give you."

"True With whom do you desire to speak?"

"Is Monsieur le Prévôt within?" inquired Ascanio, knowing perfectly well that he was not.

"No, Monsieur; he is at the Châtelet."

"Indeed! Who takes his place in his absence?"

"His daughter is here; Mademoiselle Colombe."

Ascanio felt that he was blushing to his ears.

"And there is Dame Perrine, too," the gardener continued. "Does Monsieur desire to speak with Dame Perrine or with Mademoiselle Colombe?"

This was a very simple question, surely, and yet it caused a terrible conflict in Ascanio's mind. He opened his mouth to say that he wished to see Mademoiselle Colombe, and yet it was as if the audacious words refused to pass his lips, and he asked for Dame Perrine.

The gardener, who had no suspicion that his question,

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which seemed so simple to him, had caused such a disturbance, bowed in token of obedience, and went across the courtyard toward the door of the Petit-Nesle. Ascanio followed him.

He had to cross a second courtyard, pass through a second door, then cross a small flower-garden, ascend a flight of steps, and traverse a long gallery. At the end of the gallery the gardener opened the door and said: —

"Dame Perrine, here is a young gentleman, who asks to inspect the hotel, in the king's name."

With that he stood aside and made room for Ascanio, who took his place in the doorway.

As he glanced into the room, a cloud passed before his eyes, and he leaned against the door frame for support. A very simple, and yet entirely unforeseen thing had happened; Dame Perrine was with Colombe, and he found himself in the presence of both.

Dame Perrine was sitting at the spinning-wheel, spinning. Colombe was at work at her embroidery frame. They raised their heads at the same instant and looked toward the door.

Colombe instantly recognized Ascanio. She expected him, although her reason told her that he was not likely to come. As for him, when he saw the maiden's eyes raised to his face, although their expression was infinitely soft and sweet, it seemed to him that he was dying.

The fact is, that he had anticipated a thousand difficulties, had dreamed of a thousand obstacles to be surmounted before he could win his way to his beloved. Those obstacles would have aroused all his energy and strengthened his resolution; and lo! everything came about as naturally and simply as if God, touched by the purity of his passion, had smiled upon it and blessed it from the first. He found himself in her presence when

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he was least expecting it, and of all the beautiful speech he had prepared, the fervent eloquence of which was to amaze and move her, he could not recall a phrase, a word, a syllable.

Colombe, for her part, sat motionless and dumb. The two pure-souled young creatures, who, as if they had been already joined in wedlock in heaven, felt that they belonged to one another, and who, when once their lives had brought them close together, would thenceforth form, like Salmacis and Hermaphrodite, but one existence, were terrified at their first meeting, trembled, hesitated, and stood face to face unable to find words.

Dame Perrine, half rising from her chair, and preparing to put aside her spinning, was the first to break the silence.

"What did that blockhead Raimbault say?" cried the worthy duenna. "Did you hear, Colombe?" As Colombe did not reply, she continued, walking toward Ascanio: "What is your pleasure here, my young master? Why, God forgive me!" she suddenly exclaimed, as she recognized the visitor, "it 's the gallant youth who so politely handed me the holy water at the church door these last three Sundays! What is your pleasure, my handsome friend?"

"I would be glad to speak with you," faltered Ascanio.

"With me alone?" queried Dame Perrine coquettishly.

"With you — alone — "

As he made this reply Ascanio told himself that he was a consummate ass.

"Come this way, then, young man," said Dame Perrine, opening a door at the side of the room, and signing to Ascanio to follow her.

Ascanio did as she bade him, but as he left the room he cast upon Colombe one of those long, eloquent glances wherein lovers can say so much, and which, however

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unintelligible they may be to indifferent observers, are always understood at last by the person to whom they are addressed. Colombe undoubtedly lost no portion of its meaning, for her eyes, how she knew not, having met the youth's, she blushed prodigiously, and when she felt that she was blushing, she cast her eyes down upon her embroidery, and began to mangle a poor inoffensive flower. Ascanio saw the blush, and, stopping abruptly, stepped toward Colombe; but at that moment Dame Perrine turned and called him, and he was compelled to follow her.

He had no sooner crossed the threshold of the door than Colombe dropped her needle, let her arms fall beside her chair, threw back her head, and breathed a long sigh, in which were mingled, by one of those inexplicable miracles which the heart alone can perform, regret at Ascanio's departure, and a sort of relief to feel that he was no longer there.

The young man was very perceptibly in a bad humor; with Benvenuto, who had given him such a strange commission to fulfil; with himself, for his inability to take advantage of his opportunity; but most of all with Dame Perrine, who was cruel enough to make him leave the room just when Colombe's eyes seemed to bid him remain.

So it was that, when the duenna inquired as to the purpose of his visit, Ascanio replied in a most deliberate manner, determined to be revenged upon her for his own bungling:—

"The purpose of my visit, my dear Madame, is to beg you to show me the Hôtel de Nesle from one end to the other."

"Show you the Hôtel de Nesle!" cried Dame Perrine; "why, in Heaven's name, do you desire to see it?"

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"To see if it will be convenient for us, if we shall be comfortable here, and if it is worth while for us to leave our present quarters to come and live here."

"What! come and live here! Pray have you hired the hotel of Monsieur le Prévôt?"

"No, but his Majesty gives it to us."

"His Majesty gives it to you!" exclaimed Dame Perrine, more and more amazed.

"Absolutely," replied Ascanio.

"To you?"

"Not precisely, my good woman, but to my master."

"And who is your master, if I may ask, young man? Some great foreign nobleman, no doubt?"

"Better than that, Dame Perrine, — a great artist, come hither from Florence, expressly to serve his Most Christian Majesty."

"Aha!" said the good woman, who did not understand very well; "what does your master make?"

"What does he make? Why, he makes everything: rings to put on maidens' fingers; ewers to put upon kings' tables; statues to place in the temples of the gods; and in his leisure moments he besieges or defends cities, as his caprice leads him to cause an emperor to tremble, or to reassure a pope."

"Jésus Dieu!" cried Dame Perrine: "what is your master's name?"

"His name is Benvenuto Cellini."

"It's strange that I don't know that name," muttered the duenna; "what is his profession?"

"He is a goldsmith."

Dame Perrine gazed wonderingly at Ascanio.

"A goldsmith!" she muttered, "a goldsmith! And do you fancy that Monsieur le Prévôt will give up his palace like this to a — goldsmith?"

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"If he does n't give it up, we will take it."

"By force?"

"Even so."

"But your master will hardly dare to contend against Monsieur le Prévôt, I trust."

"He has contended against three dukes and two popes."

"Jésus Dieu! Two popes! He 's not a heretic surely?"

"He is as good a Catholic as you and I, Dame Perrine: have no fear on that score; Satan is in no wise our ally. But in default of the devil, we have the king on our side."

"So! but Monsieur le Prévôt has a more powerful protector than the king."

"Whom has he, pray?"

"Madame d'Etampes."

"Then we are on equal terms," said Ascanio.

"But suppose Messire d'Estourville refuses?"

"Master Benvenuto will take."

"And suppose Messire d'Estourville shuts himself up here as in a citadel?"

"Master Cellini will lay siege to it."

"Consider that the provost has twenty-four sergeants-at-arms."

"Master Benvenuto Cellini has ten apprentices: still we are on equal terms, you see, Dame Perrine."

"But Messire d'Estourville is personally a sturdy fighter. At the tournament which took place at the time of the marriage of François I., he was one of the challengers, and all those who dared measure swords with him were unhorsed."

"Ah well! Dame Perrine, then he is just the man for Benvenuto, who has never met his match, and who,

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like Messire d'Estourville, always unhorses his adversaries. But there is this difference between them: a fortnight afterward, they who have encountered your provost are on their legs again in good health and spirits, while they who have my master to deal with never raise their heads again, and three days after are dead and buried."

"Evil will come of this! evil will come of this!" muttered Dame Perrine. "Young man, they say that fearful things are done in cities taken by assault."

"Have no fear on that head, Dame Perrine," rejoined Ascanio with a smile. "You will have to do with generous conquerors."

"What I mean, my dear child," said Dame Perrine, who was not sorry perhaps, to secure a friend among the besiegers, "is that I fear there may be bloodshed; for, so far as your proximity to us is concerned, you will understand that it cannot fail to be very agreeable to us, since society is somewhat scanty in this accursed desert to which Messire d'Estourville has consigned his daughter and myself, like two wretched nuns, although neither she nor I have taken the vows, thank God! It is n't good for man to be alone, so saith Holy Writ, and when Holy Writ mentions man, woman is included. Is not that your opinion, young man?"

"That goes without saying."

"And we are entirely alone, and therefore very doleful in this vast habitation."

"Why, do you receive no visitors here?" Ascanio asked.

"Jésus Dieu! it 's worse than if we were nuns, as I told you. Nuns have parents at least, and friends who come and talk to them through the grating. They have the refectory where they can assemble and talk together. It 's not very diverting, I know, but it 's something never-

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theless. But we have only Messire le Prévôt, who comes from time to time to lecture his daughter for growing too lovely, I think, — it 's her only crime, poor child, — and to scold me because I don't watch her closely enough, — God save the mark! when she does n't see a living soul in the world except myself, and, aside from what she says to me, does n't open her mouth except to pray. I beg you, therefore, young man, not to say to any one that you have been admitted here, that you have inspected the Grand-Nesle under my guidance, or that you talked with us for an instant at the Petit-Nesle."

"What!" cried Ascanio, "after our visit to the Grand-Nesle, I am to return with you to the Petit? In that case I shall — " He checked himself, realizing that his joy was carrying him too far.

"I think it would not be courteous, young man, after presenting yourself, as you did, to Mademoiselle Colombe, who is the mistress of the house in her father's absence, and after asking to speak with me alone, — I do not think it would be courteous, I say, to leave the Hôtel de Nesle without taking leave of her. But if you prefer not to do so, you are quite at liberty, as you know, to go into the street directly from the Grand-Nesle, which has its own exit."

"No, no, no indeed!" cried Ascanio, eagerly. "Peste! I flatter myself, Dame Perrine, that I have been as well brought up as anybody on earth, and that I know what good breeding requires in one's treatment of ladies. But, let us do what we have to do, Dame Perrine, without a moment's delay, for I am in very great haste."

Indeed, now that Ascanio knew that he was to return by way of the Petit-Nesle he was in a great hurry to be done with the Grand. And as Dame Perrine was terribly afraid of being surprised by the provost when she

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least expected it, she had no inclination to delay Ascanio! so she took down a bunch of keys from behind a door, and walked on before him.

Let us, in company with Ascanio, cast a hasty glance at this Hôtel de Nesle, where the principal scenes of our narrative will be laid.

The Hôtel, or rather the Séjour de Nesle, as it was more commonly called at that time, occupied, as our readers already know, the site on the left bank of the Seine, on which the Hôtel de Nevers was subsequently built, to be in its turn succeeded by the Mint and the Institute. It was the last building in Paris toward the southwest, and beyond its walls nothing could be seen save the city moat, and the verdant lawns of the Pré-aux-Clercs. It was built by Amaury, Lord of Nesle in Picardie, toward the close of the eighth century. Philippe le Bel bought it in 1308 and made it his royal residence. In 1520 the Tour de Nesle, of bloody and licentious memory, was separated from it, when the quay, the bridge over the moat, and the Porte de Nesle were constructed, and thenceforth the grim tower stood alone upon the river bank, like a sinner doing penance.

But the Séjour de Nesle luckily was so vast that the lopping off of part of it was not noticed. It was as large as a small village; a high wall, pierced by a broad ogive door and a smaller servants' door, protected it on the side of the quay. On entering you found yourself at first in an immense courtyard surrounded by walls; there was a door in the wall at the left, and one at the back. Passing through the door at the left, as Ascanio did, you came to a charming little building in the Gothic style of the fourteenth century; it was the Petit-Nesle, which had its own separate garden. If, on the other hand, you passed through the door in the rear wall, you saw

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at your right the Grand-Nesle, — all of stone, and flanked by two turrets, — with its high peaked roofs, surrounded by balustrades, its angular façade, its high windows with glass of many colors, and its twenty weather-vanes crying in the wind; there was room enough to provide accommodation for three bankers of to-day.

If you went on, you lost yourself in all sorts of gardens, and you found among them a tennis-court, a bowling-green, a foundry, and an arsenal; and still farther on the stable-yards, stables, cattle-sheds, and sheepfolds; there was accommodation for the establishments of three farmers of to-day.

The whole property, it should be said, was sadly neglected, and consequently in very bad condition, for Raimbault and his two assistants hardly sufficed to take proper care of the garden belonging to the Petit-Nesle, where Colombe raised flowers, and Dame Perrine vegetables. But the whole was of vast extent, well lighted, and substantially built, and with a slight outlay of trouble and money, it could be made the finest workshop in the world.

Even if the place had been infinitely less suitable, Ascanio would have been none the less enchanted with it, as his principal desire was to be brought near to Colombe.

His visit to the larger building was made very short: in less time than it takes to write it, the active youth saw everything that there was to see, and formed an opinion upon everything that he saw. Dame Perrine, finding it impossible to keep pace with him, good-naturedly handed him the keys, which he faithfully restored to her when his investigation was at an end.

"Now, Dame Perrine," said he, "I am at your service."

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"Very good: let us return for a moment to the Petit-Nesle, as you agree with me that it is the proper thing to do."

"I should say as much! It would be extremely discourteous to do otherwise."

"But not a word to Colombe of the object of your visit."

"Mon Dieu! what shall I say to her, then?" cried Ascanio.

"You 're easily embarrassed, my handsome lad. Did you not tell me that you are a goldsmith?"

"Indeed, yes."

"Very well, talk to her about jewels; that is a subject that always gladdens the heart of the most virtuous maiden. She is or is not a true daughter of Eve, and if she is a true daughter of Eve she loves anything that glitters. Besides, she has so little diversion in her solitude, poor child! that it would be a blessing to entertain her a little. To be sure, the most suitable entertainment for a girl of her age would be a good marriage; and Master Robert never comes hither that I do not whisper in his ear, 'Find a husband for the poor dear; pray find a husband for her.'"

Without stopping to consider what conjectures as to the relations between herself and the provost might be set on foot by this declaration of her familiar manner of addressing him, Dame Perrine led the way back to the Petit-Nesle and to the room where they had left Colombe.

Colombe was still absorbed in thought, and in the same attitude in which we left her. But no one knows how many times she had raised her head and fixed her eyes upon the door through which the comely youth had gone from her sight; any one who had observed these

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oft-repeated glances might have thought that she was expecting him. But as she saw the door turning upon its hinges, Colombe went about her work once more so earnestly that neither Dame Perrine nor Ascanio could suspect that it had been interrupted.

How she had divined that the young man was following the duenna is something that might have been explained by magnetism, if magnetism had then been invented.

"I bring back with me our donor of holy water, my dear Colombe, for he it is, as I thought. I was about to show him out by the door of the Grand-Nesle, when he reminded me that he had not taken leave of you. It was true enough, for you did n't say one little word to each other before. However, neither of you is dumb, God be praised!"

"Dame Perrine —" faltered Colombe, greatly embarrassed.

"Well! what is it? You must not blush like that. Monsieur Ascanio is an honorable young man, as you are a virtuous young woman. Furthermore, it seems that he is an artist in jewels, precious stones, and such gewgaws as suit the fancy of most pretty girls. He will come and show them to you, my child, if you wish."

"I need nothing," murmured Colombe.

"Possibly not at this moment; but it is to be hoped that you will not die a recluse in this accursed solitude. We are but sixteen years old, Colombe, and the day will come when we shall be a lovely *fiancée*, to whom all sorts of jewels will be presented, and after that a great lady, who must have all sorts of finery. When that time comes, it will be as well to give the preference to this youth's as to those of some other artist, who surely will not be comparable to him."

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Colombe was on the rack. Ascanio, to whom Dame Perrine's forecasts of the future were but moderately pleasing, noticed her suffering, and came to the rescue of the poor child, to whom direct conversation was a thousand times less embarrassing than this monologue by a self-constituted interpreter.

"Oh! mademoiselle," said he, "do not deny me the great privilege of bringing some of my handiwork to you; it seems to me now as if I made them for you, and as if when making them I was thinking of you. Oh! believe it, I pray you, for we artists in jewels sometimes mingle our own thoughts with the gold and silver and precious stones. In the diadems with which your heads are crowned, the bracelets which encircle your white arms, the necklaces which rest so lovingly upon your shoulders, in the flowers, the birds, the angels, the chimeras, which we make to tremble at your ears, we sometimes embody our respectful adoration."

It is our duty as an historian to state that at these soft words Colombe's heart dilated, for Ascanio, mute so long, was speaking at last, and speaking as she had dreamed that he would speak; for without raising her eyes the girl could feel his burning glance fixed upon her, and there was nothing, even to the unfamiliar tone of his voice, which did not impart a singular charm to these words which sounded so strangely in Colombe's ears, and a profound and irresistible meaning to the flowing, harmonious language of love, which maidens understand before they can speak it.

"I know," Ascanio continued, with his eyes still fixed upon Colombe, "I know that we can add nothing to your beauty. God is made none the richer by decking out his altar. But we can at least surround your graceful form with those things which are attractive and

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beautiful like itself; and when we poor, humble artificers of splendor and enchantment from the depths of our obscurity see you pass by in a blaze of glory, we console ourselves for being so far below you by the thought that our art has helped to raise you to the height whereon you stand."

"O Monsieur!" replied Colombe, covered with confusion, "your lovely things will probably be always unfamiliar to me, or at least useless. I live in solitude and obscurity, and so far is it from being the case that the solitude and obscurity are oppressive to me, that I confess that I love them, I confess that I would like to live here always, and yet I also confess that I would like well to see your jewels, not for myself but for them, — not to wear them, but to admire them."

Trembling with fear lest she had said too much, and perhaps with a longing to say even more, Colombe bowed and left the room so swiftly, that to the eyes of a man more knowing in such matters her exit would have worn the aspect of a flight.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Dame Perrine; "that 's not a long way from something like coquetry. There is no doubt, young man, that you talk like a book. Yes, yes, one can but believe that you Italians have secret means of fascinating people. No stronger proof is needed than this, — that you have enlisted me on your side at once, and 'pon honor, I find myself wishing that Messire le Prévôt will not deal too hardly with you. *Au revoir*, young man, and bid your master be on his guard. Warn him that Messire d'Estourville is as hard of heart as the devil, and wields great influence at court. For which reason, if your master will take my advice, he will abandon all thought of living at the Grand-Nesle, and especially of taking forcible possession of it. As for you —

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but we shall see you again, shall we not? Above all, do not believe Colombe; the property of her deceased mother is sufficient to enable her to indulge in baubles twenty times more costly than those you offer her. And look you, bring also some less elaborate articles; it may occur to her to make me a little present. I am not yet, thank God! so old that I need decline a little flirtation. You understand, do you not?"

Deeming it necessary, the better to make her meaning clear, to enforce her words with a gesture, she laid her hand upon the young man's arm. Ascanio jumped like one suddenly awakened from a sound sleep. Indeed, it seemed to him as if it were all a dream. He could not realize that he was under Colombe's roof, and he doubted whether the white apparition whose melodious voice was still whispering in his ear, whose slender form had just vanished from his sight, was really she for one glance from whose eyes he would have given his life that morning.

Overflowing with his present happiness and his future prospects, he promised Dame Perrine whatever she wished, without even listening to what she asked him to do. What mattered it to him? Was he not ready to give all that he possessed to see Colombe once more?

Thinking that to prolong his visit would be unbecoming, he took leave of Dame Perrine, promising to return the next day.

As he left the Petit-Nesle, Ascanio almost collided with two men who were about to enter. By the way in which one of them stared at him, even more than by his costume, he felt sure that it was the provost.

His suspicion was changed to certainty when he saw them knock at the same door by which he had just come out, and he regretted that he had not sooner taken his

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leave; for who could say that his imprudence would not be visited upon Colombe?

To negative the idea that his visit was of any importance, assuming that the provost noticed it, Ascanio walked away without once turning to look back toward the only corner of the world of which he would at that moment have cared to be king.

When he returned to the studio, he found Benvenuto absorbed in thought. The man who stopped them in the street was Primaticcio, and he was on his way, like the honorable confrère he was, to inform Cellini that, during the visit François I. paid him that morning, the imprudent artist had succeeded in making a mortal enemy of Madame la Duchesse d'Etampes.

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VII

A LOVER AND A FRIEND.

One of the two men who entered the Hôtel de Nesle as Ascanio emerged therefrom was indeed Messire Robert d'Estourville, Provost of Paris. Who the other was we shall learn in a moment.

Five minutes after Ascanio's departure, while Colombe was still listening and dreaming in her bedroom, whither she had fled, Dame Perrine hurriedly entered, and informed the young woman that her father was awaiting her in the adjoining room.

"My father!" cried Colombe in alarm. "Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" she added in an undertone, "can it be that he met him?"

"Yes, your father, my dear child," rejoined Dame Perrine, replying to the only portion of the sentence that she heard, "and with him another old man whom I do not know."

"Another old man!" exclaimed Colombe, shuddering instinctively. "Mon Dieu! Dame Perrine, what does it mean? It is the first time in two or three years that my father has not come hither alone."

However, notwithstanding her alarm she could but obey, knowing as she did her father's impatient disposition, so she summoned all her courage and returned to the room she had just left with a smile upon her lips. Despite this feeling of dread, which she experienced for the first time and could not explain, she loved Messire

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d'Estourville as a daughter should love her father, and although his demeanor toward her was far from expansive, the days on which he visited the Hôtel de Nesle were marked as red-letter days among the uniformly gloomy days of her life.

Colombe went forward with outstretched arms and her mouth half open, but the provost gave her no time either to embrace him or to speak. He took her hand, and led her to the stranger, who was leaning against the flower-laden mantel.

"My dear friend," he said, "I present my daughter to you. Colombe, "he added, "this is Comte d'Orbec, the king's treasurer and your future husband."

Colombe uttered a feeble exclamation, which she at once stifled, out of regard for the requirements of courtesy; but feeling her knees giving way beneath her, she leaned against the back of a chair for support.

Fully to understand the horror of this unexpected presentation, especially in Colombe's then frame of mind, it is necessary to know what manner of man this Comte d'Orbec was.

Messire Robert d'Estourville, Colombe's father, was certainly far from handsome; there was in his bushy eyebrows, which he drew together at the least obstacle, physical or moral, that he encountered, a savage expression, and in his whole thickset figure something heavy and awkward, which caused one to feel but slightly prepossessed in his favor; but beside Comte d'Orbec he seemed like Saint Michael the Archangel beside the dragon. The square head and the strongly accentuated features of the provost did at least indicate resolution and force of character, while his small, piercing gray lynx eyes denoted intelligence; but Comte d'Orbec, lean and withered, with his long arms like spider's claws his mosquito-

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like voice and his snail-like movements, was not only ugly, he was absolutely hideous; — it was the ugliness of the beast and the villain in one. His head was carried on one side, and his face wore a villanous smile and a treacherous expression.

So it was that Colombe, at the sight of this revolting creature, who was presented to her as her future husband when her heart and her thoughts and her eyes were still filled with the comely youth who had just gone from that very room, could not, as we have seen, wholly repress an exclamation of dismay; but her strength failed her, and she stood there pale and speechless, gazing terror-stricken into her father's face.

"I beseech you to pardon Colombe's confusion, dear friend," the provost continued; "in the first place, she is a little barbarian, who has not been away from here these two years past, the air of the time being not over healthy, as you know, for attractive maids; secondly, I have made the mistake of not informing her of our plans, which would have been time lost, however, since what I have determined upon needs no person's approval before being put in execution; and lastly, she knows not who you are, and that with your name, your great wealth, and the favor of Madame d'Etampes, you are in a position where everything is possible; but upon reflection she will appreciate the honor you confer upon us in consenting to ally your ancient blood with our nobility of more recent date; she will learn that friends of forty years' standing — "

"Enough, my dear fellow, enough, in God's name!" interposed the count. "Come, come, my child," he added, addressing Colombe with familiar and insolent assurance, which formed a striking contrast to poor Ascanio's timidity, — "come, compose yourself and call back to your

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cheeks a little of the lovely coloring that so becomes you. Mon Dieu! I know what a young girl is, you know, and a young woman too for that matter, for I have already been married twice, my dear. Good lack! you must not be disturbed like this: I don't frighten you, I hope, eh?" added the count fatuously, passing his fingers through his scanty moustache and imperial. "Your father did wrong to give me the title of husband so suddenly, which always agitates a youthful heart a little when it hears it for the first time; but you will come to it, little one, and will end by saying it yourself with that sweet little mouth of yours. Well! well! you are growing paler and paler, — God forgive me! I believe she is fainting."

As he spoke D'Orbec put out his arms to support her, but she stood erect, and stepped back as if she feared his touch no less than a serpent's, finding strength to utter a few words: —

"Pardon, monsieur, pardon, father," she faltered; "forgive me, it is nothing; but I thought, I hoped —"

"What did you think, what did you hope? Come, tell us quickly!" rejoined the provost, fixing his sharp eyes, snapping angrily, upon his daughter.

"That you would allow me to stay with you always, father," replied Colombe. "Since my poor mother's death, you have no one else to love you and care for you, and I had thought —"

"Hold your peace, Colombe," retorted the provost imperatively. "I am not old enough as yet to need a keeper, and you have arrived at the proper age to have an establishment of your own.

"Bon Dieu!" interposed D'Orbec, joining once more in the conversation, "accept me without so much ado, my love. With me you will be as happy as one can be, and

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more than one will envy you, I swear. Mordieu! I am rich, and I propose that you shall be a credit to me; you shall go to court, and shall wear jewels that will arouse the envy, I will not say of the queen, but of Madame d'Etampes herself."

I know not what thoughts these last words awoke in Colombe's heart, but the color returned to her cheeks, and she made bold to answer the count, despite her father's harsh and threatening glance: —

"I will ask my father, monseigneur, at least to give me time to reflect upon your proposal."

"What's that?" cried Messire d'Estourville violently. "Not an hour, not a minute. You are from this moment the count's betrothed, understand that, and you would be his wife this evening were it not that he is obliged to pay a visit to his estates in Normandie, and you know that my wishes are commands. Reflect indeed! Sarpejeu! D'Orbec, let us leave her ladyship. From this moment, my friend, she is yours, and you may claim her when you will. And now let us go and inspect your future abode."

D'Orbec would have been glad to tarry and add a word to what he had already said, but the provost passed his arm through his, and led him away grumbling; he contented himself therefore with saluting Colombe with his wicked smile, and went out with Messire Robert.

Behind them Dame Perrine entered through another door; she had heard the provost speaking in a loud voice, and guessed that he was as usual scolding his daughter. She arrived in time to receive Colombe in her arms.

"O mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" sobbed the poor child, putting her hand over her eyes as if to avoid the sight of the odious D'Orbec, absent though he was. "O mon

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Dieu! is this to be the end? O my golden dreams! O my poor hopes! All is lost, and naught remains for me but to die!"

We need not ask if this lament, added to Colombe's weakness and pallor, terrified Dame Perrine, and at the same time aroused her curiosity. As Colombe sadly needed to relieve her overburdened heart, she described to her worthy governess, weeping the while the bitterest tears she had ever shed, the interview between her father, Comte d'Orbec, and herself. Dame Perrine agreed that the suitor was not young or handsome, but as the worst misfortune, in her opinion, that could happen to a woman was to remain single, she insisted that it was better, when all was said, to have an old and ugly, but wealthy and influential husband, than none at all. But this doctrine was so offensive to Colombe's heart, that she withdrew to her own room, leaving Dame Perrine, whose imagination was most active, to build innumerable castles in the air in anticipation of the day when she should rise from the rank of Mademoiselle Colombe's governess to that of Comtesse d'Orbec's *dame de compagnie*.

Meanwhile the provost and the count were beginning their tour of inspection of the Grand-Nesle, as Dame Perrine and Ascanio had done an hour earlier.

Curious results would follow if walls, which are commonly supposed to have ears, had also eyes and a tongue, and could repeat to those who enter what they have seen and heard on the part of those who have gone before.

But as the walls held their peace, and simply looked at the provost and the treasurer, laughing perhaps, after the manner of walls, it was the treasurer who spoke.

"On my word," he said, as they crossed the courtyard leading from the Petit to the Grand-Nesle, "on my word, the little one will do very well; she is just such a

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woman as I need, my dear D'Estourville, virtuous, well-bred, and ignorant. When the first storm has passed over, time will straighten out everything, believe me. I know how it is; every little girl dreams of a young, handsome, clever, and wealthy husband. Mon Dieu! I have at least half of the requisite qualities. Few men can say as much, so that's a great point in my favor." Passing from his future wife to the property he was to occupy, and speaking with the same shrill, greedy accent of the one as of the other, "This old Nesle," he continued, "is a magnificent habitation, on my honor! and I congratulate you upon it. We shall be marvellously comfortable here, my wife and I, and my whole treasury. Here we will have our own apartments, there will be my offices, and over yonder the servants' quarters. The place as a whole has been allowed to run to seed. But with the expenditure of a little money, which we will find a way to make his Majesty pay, we will give a good account of ourselves. By the way, D'Estourville, are you perfectly sure of retaining the property? You should take steps to perfect your title to it; so far as I now remember, the king did not give it you, after all."

"He did not give it me, true," replied the provost with a laugh, "but he let me take it, which is much the same thing."

"Very good; but suppose that some other should play you the trick of making a formal request for it from him."

"Ah! such a one would be very ill received, I promise you, when he should come to take possession, and, being sure as I am of Madame d'Etampes's support and yours, I would make him sorely repent his pretensions. No, no, my dear fellow, my mind is at ease, and the Hôtel de Nesle belongs to me as truly as my daughter

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Colombe belongs to you; go, therefore, without fear on that score, and return quickly."

As the provost uttered these words, the truth of which neither he nor his interlocutor had any reason to doubt, a third personage, escorted by Raimbault the gardener, appeared upon the threshold of the door leading from the quadrangular courtyard into the gardens of the Petit-Nesle. It was the Vicomte de Marmagne.

He also was a suitor for Colombe's hand, but by no means a favored one. He was a fair-haired scamp, with a pink face, consequential, insolent, garrulous, forever boasting of his relations with women, who often used him as a cloak for their serious amours, overflowing with pride in his post of secretary to the king, which permitted him to approach his Majesty in the same way in which his greyhounds and parrots and monkeys approached him. The provost, therefore, was not deceived by his apparent favor and the superficial familiarity of his relations with his Majesty, which favor and familiarity he owed, so it was said, to his decidedly unmoral additions to the duties of his post. Furthermore, the Vicomte de Marmagne had long since devoured all his patrimony, and had no other fortune than the liberality of François. Now it might happen any day that this liberal disposition would cease, so far as he was concerned, and Messire Robert d'Estourville was not fool enough to rely, in matters of such importance, upon the caprice of a very capricious monarch. He had therefore gently denied the suit of the Vicomte de Marmagne, admitting to him confidentially and under the seal of secrecy that his daughter's hand had long been promised to another. Thanks to this confidential communication, which supplied a motive for the provost's refusal, the Vicomte de Marmagne and Messire Robert d'Estourville had continued to be in ap-

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pearance the best friends in the world, although from that day the viscount detested the provost, and the provost was suspicious of the viscount, who could not succeed in concealing his rancor beneath an affable and smiling exterior from a man so accustomed as Messire Robert to peer into the dark corners of courts, and the deepest depths of men's hearts. So it was that, whenever the viscount made his appearance, the provost expected to find in him, notwithstanding his invariably affable and engaging demeanor, a bearer of bad news, which he would always impart with tears in his eyes, and with the feigned, premeditated grief which squeezes out poison upon a wound, drop by drop.

As for Comte d'Orbec, the Vicomte de Marmagne had wellnigh come to an open rupture with him; it was one of the rare instances of court enmities visible to the naked eye. D'Orbec despised Marmagne, because Marmagne had no fortune and could make no display. Marmagne despised D'Orbec, because D'Orbec was old and had consequently lost the power of making himself agreeable to women; in fine, they mutually detested each other, because, whenever they met upon the same path, one of them had taken something from the other.

So it was that when they met on this occasion the two courtiers greeted each other with that cold, sardonic smile which is never seen save in palace antechambers, and which means, "Ah! if we were n't a pair of cowards, how long ago one of us would have ceased to live!"

Nevertheless, as it is the historian's duty to set down everything, good and bad alike, it is proper to state that they confined themselves to this salutation and this smile, and that Comte d'Orbec, escorted by the provost, and without exchanging a word with Marmagne, left the

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house immediately by the same door by which his enemy entered.

Let us hasten to add, that, notwithstanding the hatred which kept them asunder, these two men were ready, in case of need, to unite temporarily to destroy a third.

Comte d'Orbec having taken his leave, the provost found himself *tête-à-tête* with the Vicomte de Marmagne. He walked toward him with a joyous countenance, in striking contrast to the melancholy visage with which the other awaited him.

"Well, my dear provost," said Marmagne, to open the conversation, "you seem in extremely good spirits."

"While you, my dear Marmagne," rejoined the provost, "seem sadly depressed."

"Simply because, as you know, my poor D'Estourville, my friends' misfortunes afflict me as keenly as my own."

"Yes, yes, I know your heart," said the provost.

"And when I saw you in such a joyous mood, with your future son-in-law, Comte d'Orbec, — for your daughter's betrothal to him is no longer a secret, and I congratulate you upon it, my dear D'Estourville — "

"You know that I told you long ago that Colombe's hand was promised, my dear Marmagne."

"Yes, but, 'pon honor, I cannot understand how you can consent to part from such a fascinating child."

"Oh! I do not propose to part from her," replied Messire Robert. "My son-in-law, Comte d'Orbec, will bring his whole establishment across the Seine, and will take up his abode at the Grand-Nesle, while I shall spend my unoccupied moments at the Petit."

"My poor friend!" exclaimed Marmagne, shaking his head with an air of profound sadness, and placing one hand upon the provost's arm while with the other he wiped away a tear which did not exist.

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"Why 'poor friend'?" demanded Messire Robert. "Come! what have you to tell me now?"

"Am I the first, pray, to tell you the unpleasant news?"

"What is it? Speak out!"

"You know, my dear provost, that we must take things philosophically in this world, and there is an old proverb which we poor weak mortals should keep constantly in mind, for it sums up the accumulated wisdom of all nations."

"What is the proverb? Say what you have to say."

"Man proposes, my dear friend, man proposes, and God disposes."

"In God's name, what have I proposed for him to dispose of? Say on, I beg you, and let us have done with it."

"You have intended the Grand-Nesle for the residence of your daughter and son-in-law?"

"Most assuredly; and I trust that they will be installed there within three months."

"Undeceive yourself, my dear provost, undeceive yourself; the Hôtel de Nesle is no longer your property at this moment. Pardon me for afflicting you thus, but I thought, knowing your somewhat hasty nature, that it would be better for you to learn the news from the mouth of a friend, who would spare your feelings in the telling as much as possible, rather than from some malicious fellow, who would take a keen delight in your misfortune, and brutally cast it in your face. Alas! no, my friend, the Grand-Nesle is yours no longer."

"Who has taken it from me, I pray to know?"

"His Majesty."

"His Majesty!"

"Himself, so you see that the disaster is irreparable."

"When was it done?"

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"This morning. If I had not been detained by my duties at the Louvre, you would have been sooner apprised of it."

"You are mistaken, Marmagne; it's some false report set afloat by my enemies, and which you are in too great haste to repeat."

"I would be glad for many reasons if it were so, but unfortunately I was not told of it; I heard it."

"You heard it? what?"

"I heard the king with his own mouth present the Grand-Nesle to another."

"Who is this other?"

"An Italian adventurer, a paltry goldsmith, whose name you perhaps have heard; an intriguing rascal named Benvenuto Cellini, who came from Florence some two months since, whom the king has taken upon his shoulders for some unknown reason, and to whom he paid a visit to-day with his whole court at the Cardinal of Ferrara's hotel, where this pretended artist has established his studio."

"And you say that you were present, viscount, when the king presented the Grand-Nesle to this wretch?"

"I was," replied Marmagne, pronouncing the words very slowly and distinctly, and dwelling upon them with evident relish.

"Oho!" said the provost, "very good! I am ready for your adventurer: let him come and take possession of his royal gift."

"Do you mean that you would offer resistance?"

"To be sure!"

"To an order of the king?"

"To an order of God or the devil, — to any order, in short, which should undertake to eject me from this place."

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"Softly, provost, softly," said Marmagne, "over and above the king's wrath, to which you expose yourself, this Benvenuto Cellini is in himself more to be feared than you think."

"Do you know who I am, viscount?"

"First of all, he stands very high in his Majesty's good graces, — only for the moment, to be sure, — but it is none the less true."

"Do you know that I, the Provost of Paris, represent his Majesty at the Châtelet, that I sit there beneath a canopy, in a short coat and a cloak with a collar, with my sword at my side, a hat with waving plumes on my head, and in my hand a staff covered with blue velvet?"

"Secondly, I will tell you that this accursed Italian makes no scruple of offering combat, as if he stood on equal terms with them, to princes, cardinals, and popes."

"Do you know that I have a private seal which imparts the fullest authority to those documents to which it is affixed?"

"It is said, furthermore, that the damned bully wounds or kills recklessly every one who ventures to oppose him."

"Do you not know that a body guard of twenty-four men-at-arms is at my orders night and day?"

"They say that he attacked a goldsmith against whom he had a grudge, although he was surrounded by a guard of sixty men."

"You forget that the Hôtel de Nesle is fortified, that the walls are crenellated, and there are machicoulis above the doors, to say nothing of the city fortifications which render it impregnable on one side."

"It is said that he is as thoroughly at home in the science of sieges as Bayard or Antonio de Leyra."

"As to that we shall see."

"I am sorely afraid."

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"I will bide my time."

"Look you, my dear friend, will you allow me to offer you a little advice?"

"Say on, so that it be brief."

"Do not try to struggle with one who is stronger than you."

"Stronger than I, a paltry Italian mechanic! Viscount, you exasperate me!"

"You may find reason to repent, 'pon honor! I speak whereof I know."

"Viscount, you try my temper."

"Consider that the fellow has the king on his side."

"And I have Madame d'Etampes."

"His Majesty may take it ill of you to resist his will."

"I have already done it, Monsieur, and successfully."

"Yes, I know, in the matter of the toll at the bridge of Mantes. But—"

"But what?"

"One risks nothing, or very little at all events, in resisting a weak, good-natured king, while one risks everything in entering into a contest with a powerful, formidable opponent like Benvenuto Cellini."

"By Mahomet's belly, Viscount, do you propose to drive me mad?"

"On the contrary, my purpose is to make you discreet."

"Enough, Viscount, enough! Ah! the villain shall pay dear, I swear, for these moments that your friendship has caused me to pass."

"God grant it, Provost! God grant it!"

"Very good, very good! You have nothing else to tell me?"

"No, no, I believe not," the viscount replied, as if he

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were trying to recall some item of news which would make a fitting pendant to the other.

"Very well, adieu!" cried the provost.

"Adieu, my poor friend!"

"Adieu!"

"At all events I have given you warning."

"Adieu!"

"I shall have no reason to reproach myself: that consoles me."

"Adieu! adieu!"

"Good luck attend you! But I must say that I express that wish with but little hope of its being gratified."

"Adieu! adieu! adieu!"

"Adieu!"

And the Vicomte de Marmagne, sighing as if his heart would burst, and with grief-stricken face, took his departure, gesticulating mournfully, after he had pressed the provost's hand as if he were saying farewell to him forever.

The provost followed him, and with his own hands secured the street door behind him.

It will readily be understood that this friendly conversation had heated Messire d'Estourville's blood and stirred his bile to an extreme degree. He was looking around in search of some one upon whom he might vent his ill-humor, when he suddenly remembered the young man whom he had seen emerging from the Grand-Nesle as he entered with Comte d'Orbec. As Raimbault was at hand he had not far to seek for one who could answer his questions touching that stranger, so he summoned the gardener with one of those imperative gestures which admit no delay, and asked him what he knew about the young man.

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The gardener replied that the individual to whom his master referred had presented himself in the king's name, to inspect the Grand-Nesle; that he did not consider it his duty to take anything upon himself, and therefore referred him to Dame Perrine, who good-naturedly showed him over the whole establishment.

The provost thereupon rushed to the Petit-Nesle to demand an explanation from the worthy duenna, but she unfortunately had just gone out to purchase the weekly supply of provisions.

There remained Colombe, but as the provost could not believe that she had seen the youthful stranger, after the forcible and explicit terms in which he had forbidden Dame Perrine to allow good-looking young men to approach her, he did not even speak to her on the subject.

As his duties required him to return to the Grand-Châtelet, he departed, ordering Raimbault, on pain of instant dismissal, to admit no person to the Grand or Petit-Nesle, whoever he might be, or in whosesoever name he might come, especially the miserable adventurer who had been admitted previously.

So it was that, when Ascanio presented himself on the following day with his wares, in accordance with Dame Perrine's suggestion, Raimbault simply opened a small window, and informed him through the bars that the Hôtel de Nesle was closed to everybody, particularly to him.

Ascanio, as may be imagined, withdrew in despair; but we hasten to say that he did not for a moment attribute this extraordinary reception to Colombe; the maiden had bestowed but one glance upon him, had uttered but one sentence, but that glance was so eloquent of shy affection, and there was such a wealth of loving melody in that one sentence, that it had seemed to Ascanio since

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he parted from her as if an angel's voice were singing in his heart.

He fancied therefore, and with good reason, that, as he had been seen by the provost, the provost was the author of that terrible order of which he was the victim.

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VIII.

PREPARATIONS FOR ATTACK AND DEFENCE.

ASCANIO had no sooner returned to the studio on the previous day, and made his report to Benvenuto touching that part of his expedition which related to the topography of the Hôtel de Nesle, than the goldsmith, seeing that it met his requirements in every respect, hastened to the bureau of Seigneur de Neufville, the first secretary of the king's treasury, to obtain from him documentary evidence of the royal gift. Seigneur de Neufville demanded until the following day to assure himself of the validity of Master Benvenuto's claims, and, although the latter considered him extremely impertinent to refuse to take his word for it, he realized the reasonableness of the demand, and assented, resolved however not to allow Messire de Neufville a half-hour's grace on the following day.

He was punctual to the minute, and was at once admitted to the secretary's presence, which he considered a favorable augury.

"Well, Monseigneur," he said, "is the Italian a liar, or did he tell you the truth?"

"The whole truth, my dear friend."

"That is very fortunate."

"And the king has ordered me to hand you a deed of gift in proper form."

"It will be welcome."

"And yet —" continued the secretary, hesitatingly.

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"Well, what more is there? Let us hear."

"And yet if you would allow me to offer you some good advice — "

"Good advice! the devil! that 's a rare article, Monsieur le Secrétaire; say on, say on."

"I should advise you to seek another location for your studio than the Grand-Nesle."

"Indeed!" retorted Benvenuto dryly; "think you that it is not a convenient location?"

"It is, indeed; and truth compels me to state that you would have great difficulty in finding a better."

"Very well, what is the matter then?"

"That it belongs to a personage of too much importance for you to come in collision with him without danger."

"I myself belong to the noble King of France," rejoined Cellini, "and I shall never flinch so long as I act in his name."

"Very good, but in our country, Master Benvenuto, every nobleman is king in his own house, and in seeking to eject the provost from the house which he occupies you risk your life."

"We must all die sooner or later," was Cellini's sententious reply.

"You are determined, then — "

"To kill the devil before the devil kills me. Trust me for that, Monsieur le Secrétaire. Let the provost look well to himself, as all those must do who assume to oppose the king's wishes, especially when Master Benvenuto Cellini has it in charge to carry them out."

Thereupon Messire Nicolas de Neufville made an end of his philanthropic observations, but alleged all sorts of formalities to be complied with before delivering the deed. But Benvenuto tranquilly seated himself, declar-

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ing that he would not stir until the document was placed in his hands, and that he was determined to stay the night there, if necessary, having foreseen that possibility, and taken the precaution to say to his people that he might not return.

Taking note of this determination, Messire Nicolas de Neufville, regardless of consequences, delivered the deed of gift to Benvenuto Cellini, taking pains, however, to advise Messire Robert d'Estourville of what he had been compelled to do, in part by the king's will, in part by the goldsmith's persistence.

Benvenuto returned to his domicile without saying anything to anybody of what he had done, locked up the deed in the drawer in which he kept his precious stones, and calmly resumed his work.

The information transmitted to the provost by the secretary convinced Messire Robert that Benvenuto, as the Vicomte de Marmagne had said that he would do, persisted in his purpose to take possession of the Hôtel de Nesle, peaceably or by force. The provost, therefore, prepared to maintain his rights, sent for his twenty-four sergeants-at-arms, posted sentinels upon the walls, and went to the Châtelet only when the duties of his office absolutely compelled him to do so.

Days passed, however, and Cellini, tranquilly occupied with the work he had in hand, made not the least demonstration. But the provost felt certain that this apparent tranquillity was only a ruse, and that his foe proposed to wait until he had grown weary of watching, and then take him unawares. And so Messire Robert, with eyes and ears always on the alert, his mind always in a state of extreme tension, and engrossed with warlike thoughts, was finally reduced by this condition of affairs, which was neither peace nor war, to a state of feverish

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expectation and anxiety, which threatened, if it were prolonged, to make him as mad as the governor of the Castle of San Angelo. He could not eat or sleep, and grew perceptibly thinner.

From time to time he would abruptly draw his sword and begin to make passes at a wall, shouting: —

"Let him come on! let him come on, the villain! Let him come on, I am ready for him!"

But Benvenuto did not come on.

D'Estourville had his calmer moments, too, during which he would succeed in persuading himself that the goldsmith's tongue was longer than his sword, and that he would never dare to carry out his damnable schemes. It was at one of these moments that Colombe, happening to come out of her room, observed all the warlike preparations, and asked her father what was the occasion of them.

"A scoundrel to be chastised, that 's all," the provost replied.

As it was the provost's business to chastise, Colombe did not even ask who the scoundrel was whose chastisement was preparing, being too deeply preoccupied with her own thoughts not to be content with this brief explanation.

In very truth, Messire Robert with a single word had made a fearful change in his daughter's life; that life, hitherto so calm, so simple, so obscure and secluded, that life of peaceful days and tranquil nights, was like a lake whose surface is suddenly ruffled by a tempest. She had felt at times before that her soul was sleeping, that her heart was empty, but she thought that her solitude was the cause of her melancholy, and attributed the emptiness of her heart to the fact that she had lost her mother in her infancy. And now, without warning, her

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existence, her thoughts, her heart and her soul were filled to overflowing, but with grief.

Ah! how she then sighed for the days of ignorance and tranquillity, when the commonplace but watchful friendship of Dame Perrine was almost sufficient for her happiness; the days of hope and faith, when she reckoned upon the future as one reckons upon a friend; the days of filial trust and confidence, when she believed in the affection of her father. Alas! her future now was the hateful love of Comte d'Orbec; her father's affection was simply ambition so disguised. Why, instead of being the only inheritor of a noble name and vast fortune, was she not the child of some obscure bourgeois of the city, who would have cared for and cherished her? In that case she might have fallen in with this young artist, in whose speech there was so much to move and fascinate, this handsome Ascanio, who seemed to have such a wealth of happiness and love to bestow.

But when the rapid beating of her heart and her flushed cheeks warned her that the stranger's image had filled her thoughts too long, she condemned herself to the task of banishing the lovely dream, and succeeded in placing before her eyes the desolating reality. Since her father had made known to her his matrimonial plans, she had expressly forbidden Dame Perrine to receive Ascanio, upon one pretext or another, threatening to tell her father everything if she disobeyed; and as the governess, fearing to be accused of complicity with him, had said nothing of the hostile projects of Ascanio's master, poor Colombe believed herself to be well protected in that direction.

It must not be supposed, however, that the sweet-natured child was resigned to the idea of obeying her father's commands. No; her whole being revolted at

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the thought of an alliance with this man, whom she would have hated had she really known what hate was. Beneath her beautiful, pale brow she revolved a thousand thoughts, hitherto unknown to her mind, — thoughts of revolt and rebellion, which she looked upon almost as crimes, and for which she asked God's forgiveness upon her knees. Then it occurred to her to go and throw herself at the king's feet. But she had heard it whispered that the same idea had occurred to Diane de Poitiers under much more terrible circumstances, and that she left her honor there. Madame d'Etampes might protect her too, if she chose. But would she choose? Would she not greet the complaints of a mere child with a contemptuous smile? Such a smile of mockery and contempt she had seen upon her father's lips when she begged him to keep her with him, and it made a terrible impression upon her.

Thus Colombe had no refuge but God: and she knelt before her *prie-Dieu* a hundred times a day, imploring the Omnipotent to send succor to her weakness before the end of the three months which still separated her from her formidable *fiancé*, or, if she could hope for no relief on earth, to allow her at least to join her mother in heaven.

Ascanio's existence, meanwhile, was no less troublous and unhappy than that of his beloved. Twenty times since Raimbault had made known to him the order which forbade his admission to the Hôtel de Nesle had he loitered dreaming about the lofty walls which separated him from his life, — in the morning before anybody had risen, and at night after everybody was asleep. But not once, either openly or furtively, did he try to make his way into the forbidden garden. He still had that virginal respect of early youth, which protects the woman

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whom one loves against the very passion which she may have to fear at a later period.

But this did not prevent Ascanio, as he worked away at his carving and chasing, from indulging in many an extravagant dream, to say nothing of those he dreamed in his morning and evening promenades, or during his troubled sleep at night. These dreams were concerned more especially with the day, at first so much dreaded, now so eagerly desired by him, when Benvenuto should assume possession of the Hôtel de Nesle; for Ascanio knew his master, and that all this apparent tranquillity was that of a volcano breeding an eruption. Cellini had given out that the eruption would take place on the following Sunday. Ascanio had no doubt, therefore, that on the following Sunday Cellini's undertaking would be accomplished.

But so far as he was able to judge in his walks around the Séjour de Nesle, the undertaking would not be accomplished without some difficulty, thanks to the guard which was constantly maintained upon the walls; and Ascanio had observed about the hotel all the indications of a fortified post. If there should be an attack, there would be a defence; and as the fortress seemed little disposed to capitulate, it was clear that it must be taken by assault. It was at that decisive moment that Ascanio's chivalrous nature might expect to find an opportunity to display itself. There would be a battle, there would be a breach in the walls to carry, and perhaps there would be a conflagration. Ah! something of that sort was what he longed for! a conflagration most of all, — a conflagration whereby Colombe's life would be endangered! Then he would dart up the tottering staircases, among the burning rafters, and over the crumbling walls. He would hear her voice calling for help; he

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would seek her out, take her in his arms, dying and almost unconscious, and bear her away to safety through the roaring sea of flame, her heart against his, and inhaling her breath. Then, having brought her safely through a thousand dangers, he would lay her at the feet of her despairing father, who would reward his gallant conduct by giving her to the man who had saved her life. Or else, as he bore her in his arms over a frail plank thrown across the flaming chasm, his foot would slip, and they would fall together and die in each other's arms, their hearts blending in one last sigh, in a first and last kiss. This latter alternative was not to be despised by one who had so little hope in his heart as Ascanio; for next to the felicity of living for each other, the greatest happiness is to die together.

Thus it will be seen that all our friends were passing through some very agitated days and nights, with the exception of Benvenuto Cellini, who seemed entirely to have forgotten his hostile designs upon the Hôtel de Nesle, and of Scozzone, who knew nothing of them.

The whole week passed away thus, and Benvenuto Cellini, having worked conscientiously throughout the six days that composed it, and having almost completed the clay model of his Jupiter, donned his coat of mail on the Saturday about five o'clock, buttoned his doublet over it, and, bidding Ascanio accompany him, bent his steps toward the Hôtel de Nesle. When they reached the spot, Cellini made the circuit of the walls, spying out the weak spots, and meditating his plan of siege.

The attack offered more than one difficulty, as the provost had said to his friend Marmagne, as Ascanio had informed his master, and as Benvenuto was now able to see for himself. The Château de Nesle was crenellated and machicolated, was defended by a double wall on the

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river side, and furthermore by the city moats and ramparts on the side of the Pré-aux-Clercs. It was one of those massive and imposing feudal structures, which were equal to the task of defending themselves by their mass alone, provided that the doors were securely fastened, and of repelling without outside assistance the assaults of *tirelaines* and *larroneurs*, as they were called in those days, or of the king's men, if need were. This was often the case at that interesting epoch, when one was generally compelled to do police duty for himself.

Having made his reconnoissance according to all the ancient and modern rules of strategy, and deeming it to be his duty to summon the place to surrender before laying siege to it, he knocked at the little door by which Ascanio had once entered. For him as for Ascanio the small window opened; but it was the martial countenance of an archer, instead of that of the pacific gardener, which appeared in the opening.

"What do you want?" the archer demanded of the stranger who dared to knock at the door of the Hôtel de Nesle.

"To take possession of the hotel, which has been given to me, Benvenuto Cellini," replied the goldsmith.

"Very good, — wait," rejoined the fellow, and he went at once to notify Messire d'Estourville, as he had been ordered to do.

A moment later he returned, accompanied by the provost, who did not show himself, but stood listening, with bated breath, in a corner, surrounded by part of his garrison, in order to judge the better of the gravity of the affair.

"We do not know what you mean," said the archer.

"If that be so," said Cellini, "hand this document to Messire le Prévôt; it is a certified copy of the deed

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of gift." And he passed the parchment through the window.

The sergeant disappeared a second time; but as he had simply to put out his hand to hand the copy to the provost, the window opened again almost immediately.

"Here is his answer," said the sergeant, passing through the bars the parchment torn in pieces.

"Very good," rejoined Cellini with perfect tranquillity. "*Au revoir.*"

He returned to his studio, highly gratified by the attention with which Ascanio had followed his scrutiny of the place, and the young man's judicious suggestions as to the *coup de main* they were to attempt at some time; and he assured his pupil that he would have made a distinguished general, were it not that he was destined to become a still more distinguished artist, which, in Cellini's view, was infinitely preferable.

The next morning the sun rose in all his glory; Benvenuto had requested his workmen to come to the studio, although it was Sunday, and not one of them failed to appear.

"My children," said the master, "it is undoubtedly true that I engaged you to work at the goldsmith's trade, and not to fight. But during the two months that we have been together we have learned to know one another so well that, in a serious emergency, I feel that I can count upon you, as you all and always can count upon me. You know what I have in contemplation: we are but poorly accommodated here, with but little air and little space, and our elbows are too cramped to allow us to undertake great works, or even to use the forge with any degree of vigor. The king, in the presence of you all, deigned to bestow upon me a larger and more commodious abode; but, as he has no leisure to bestow upon

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trifling details, he left it to me to install myself therein. Now, the present possessor does not choose to give over to me this property which his Majesty has so generously presented to me; therefore we must take it. The Provost of Paris, who retains possession in the face of his Majesty's order, (it would seem that such things are of common occurrence in this land,) does not know the man with whom he has to do; as soon as I am refused, I demand; as soon as I am resisted, I take by force. Are you disposed to assist me? I do not conceal from you that there will be danger in so doing: there is a battle to be fought, there are walls to be scaled, and other harmless amusements to be indulged in. There is nothing to fear from the police or the patrol, because we act by his Majesty's authority; but it may mean death, my children. Therefore, let those who wish to go elsewhere do so without hesitation, let those who wish to remain here not be ashamed to say as much; I ask for none but bold and resolute hearts. If you leave me to go alone with Pagolo and Ascanio, have no fear on our behalf. I know not how I shall go to work; but I do know this, that I will not be disappointed for that. But, by the blood of Christ! if you lend me your hearts and your arms, as I hope you will, woe to the provost and the provostry. Now that you are fully instructed in the matter, speak: will you follow me?"

They all shouted with one voice: —

"Anywhere, master; wherever you choose to lead us!"

"Bravo, my children! Then you are all in for the sport?"

"All!"

"Then let the tempest howl!" cried Benvenuto; "at last we are to have a little diversion. I have been rusty long enough. Up, up, brave hearts and swords! Ah!

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thank God! we are soon to give and receive a few lusty blows! Look you, my dear boys, look you, my gallant friends, we must arm ourselves, we must agree upon a plan; let them be ready to look to themselves, and *vive la joie!* I will give you all that I possess in the way of weapons, offensive and defensive, in addition to those that are hanging on the wall, where every one can choose at will. Ah! what we really need is a good culverin: but there's its value in arquebuses, hackbuts, pikes, swords, and daggers; and there are coats of mail galore, and cuirasses and helmets. Come, haste, haste, and let us dress for the ball! the provost shall pay for the music!"

"Hurrah!" cried all his companions.

Thereupon the studio was the scene of a commotion, a tumult, wonderful to look upon; the verve and enthusiasm of the master infected every heart and every face. They tried on cuirasses, brandished swords, tested the point of daggers, laughed and sang, as if a masquerade or festival of some sort were in progress. Benvenuto ran hither and thither, handing a boot to this one, buckling the belt of another, and feeling the blood course hotly and freely through his veins, as if this were the life he truly loved.

The workmen meanwhile indulged in jokes at one another's expense, commenting freely upon the bellicose demeanor and awkward attitudes of their fellows.

"Look, master!" cried one of them; "look at Simon-le-Gaucher,[1] putting his sword on the same side as we! On the right, man! on the right!"

"See Jehan," retorted Simon, "holding his halberd as he'll hold his cross when he's a bishop!"

"There's Pagolo putting on a double coat of mail!" said Jehan.

[1] Left-handed.

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"Why not?" replied Pagolo. "Hermann the German is arraying himself like a knight in the days of the Emperor Barbarossa!"

In fact, the youth referred to by the appellation of Hermann the German (a somewhat pleonastic title, as his name alone was so distinctively Germanic in sound as to indicate that its owner belonged to some one of the circles of the Holy Empire), — Hermann, we say, had covered himself from head to foot with iron, and resembled one of the gigantic statues which the sculptors of that artistic age were accustomed to carve upon tombs.

Benvenuto, although the physical strength of this redoubtable comrade from beyond the Rhine had become proverbial in the studio, remarked that he would be likely to experience some difficulty in moving, being so completely encased, and that his usefulness would certainly be lessened rather than increased. Hermann's only reply was to leap upon a table as lightly as if he were clad in velvet, take down an enormous hammer, wave it around his head, and strike the anvil three such terrific blows that each of them drove it an inch into the ground. There was nothing to say to such a reply; so Benvenuto waved his hand and nodded his head respectfully in token of satisfaction.

Ascanio alone made his toilet apart from the others. He could not avoid a feeling of uneasiness as to the results of the enterprise upon which they were about to embark; for it might well be that Colombe would not forgive him for attacking her father, especially if the struggle should lead to some grave catastrophe, and he would find himself farther removed from her heart, although nearer to her eyes.

Scozzone, half joyous, half anxious, wept one moment and laughed the next. The change of location and the

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prospect of a battle were by no means unpleasing to her, but as for blows and wounds, that was another matter; the preparations for the combat made the frolicsome creature dance for joy, but its possible results made the woman that was in her tremble.

Benvenuto at last noticed her, smiling and weeping at the same time, and he went to her side.

"Thou wilt remain here, Scozzone, with Ruperta," he said, "and prepare lint for the wounded, and a good dinner for those who come safely through it."

"Oh no, no!" cried Scozzone; "oh pray let me go with you! With you I have courage enough to defy the provost and all his myrmidons, but alone here with Ruperta I should die of anxiety and fear."

"Oh, I could never consent to that," replied Benvenuto; "it would trouble me too much to think that some mishap might befall thee. Thou wilt pray for us, dear child, while awaiting our return."

"Listen, Benvenuto," rejoined the maiden, as if struck by a sudden thought, "you understand, of course, that I cannot endure the thought of remaining quiet here while you are fighting yonder, wounded, perhaps dying. But there is a way of satisfying both of us; instead of praying for your safety here in the studio, I will go and pray in the church nearest to the spot. In that way I shall be out of danger, and shall know the result immediately, whether it be a victory or a defeat."

"Very well, so be it," replied Benvenuto; "it is understood, of course, that we shall not go forth to kill others, or to be killed ourselves, without first fulfilling the pious duty of listening to mass. We will go together to the church of the Grands Augustins, which is nearer than any other to the Hôtel de Nesle, and will leave thee there, little one."

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These arrangements determined upon, and the preparations for the affray at an end, they drank a glass of Burgundy to the success of their enterprise. To their weapons, offensive and defensive, they added hammers, tongs, ladders, and ropes, and left the studio, not after the manner of an army corps, but two by two, at sufficiently long intervals not to attract attention. It was not that a *coup de main* was a more unfrequent occurrence in those days than an *émeute* or a change of ministry in these days of ours; but, truth to say, it was not customary to select the Sabbath day, or the hour of noon, for this sort of diversion, and it required all Benvenuto's audacity, reinforced by his consciousness that right was on his side, to venture upon such an undertaking.

One after another our heroes arrived at the Grands Augustins, and, having given their weapons and tools into the charge of the sacristan, who was a friend of Simon-le-Gaucher, they entered the church to listen devoutly to the blessed sacrifice of the mass, and to implore God's help in exterminating as many archers as possible.

Truth compels us to state, however, that despite the gravity of the impending crisis, despite his exemplary piety, and despite the importance of the matters to which his prayers had reference, Benvenuto had no sooner entered the church than his actions indicated that his mind was upon something very different. His distraction was due to the fact that just behind him, but on the other side of the nave, sat a young girl reading from an illuminated missal, — a young girl so adorably lovely that she might well have confused the thoughts of a saint, much more of a sculptor. Under such circumstances the artist sadly interfered with the devotions of the Christian. The gallant Cellini could not resist the desire to have some one to join him in his admiration, and as

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Catherine, who was at his left, would certainly have frowned upon his inattention, he turned to Ascanio, who was at his right, with the purpose of bidding him turn his eyes toward the lovely picture.

But Ascanio's eyes needed no bidding in that direction; from the moment that he entered the church his gaze was riveted upon the maiden, and his eyes never left her face.

Benvenuto, seeing that he was absorbed in contemplation of the same object, simply nudged him with his elbow.

"Yes," said Ascanio; "yes, it is Colombe. O master, is she not beautiful?"

It was indeed Colombe; her father, not anticipating an attack at high noon, had given her permission, not without some reluctance, to go to the Augustins to pray. Colombe, it is true, was very earnest in her request, for it was the only consolation that remained to her. Dame Perrine was by her side.

"Ah çà! who is Colombe?" was Benvenuto's very natural query.

"Ah! yes, you do not know her. Colombe is the daughter of the provost, Messire d'Estourville himself. Is she not beautiful?" he said again.

"No," rejoined Benvenuto, "no, it's not Colombe. 'T is Hebe, Ascanio, the goddess of youth; the Hebe whom my great King François has ordered at my hands; the Hebe of whom I have dreamed, for whom I have prayed to God, and who has come down from above in response to my prayer."

Regardless of the incongruity of the idea of Hebe reading her missal, and pouring out her heart in prayer, Benvenuto continued his hymn to beauty simultaneously with his devotion and his military plans: the goldsmith,

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the Catholic, and the strategist predominated in his mind by turns.

"Our Father who art in heaven — Look, Ascanio, what clean-cut, expressive features! — Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven — How fascinatingly graceful the undulating outline of her figure! — Give us this day our daily bread — And thou sayest that such a lovely child is the daughter of that rascally provost whom I propose to exterminate with my own hand? — And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us — Even though I have to burn down the Hôtel to do it — Amen!"

And Benvenuto crossed himself, having no doubt that he had just concluded a most expressive rendering of the Lord's prayer.

The mass came to an end while he was still absorbed in these heterogeneous ideas, which might seem somewhat profane in the case of a man of different temperament at a different epoch, but which were altogether natural in so reckless a nature as Cellini's, at a time when Clement Marot was putting the seven penitential psalms into gallant verse.

As soon as the *Ite, missa est*, was pronounced, Benvenuto and Catherine exchanged a warm grasp of the hand. Then, while the girl, wiping away a tear, remained on the spot where she was to await the result of the combat, Cellini and Ascanio, their eyes still fixed upon Colombe, who had not once looked up from her book, went with their companions to take a drop of holy water; after which they separated, to meet in a deserted *cul-de-sac* about half-way from the church to the Hôtel de Nesle.

Catherine, in accordance with the prearranged plan, remained to the celebration of high mass, as did Colombe

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and Dame Perrine, who had simply arrived a little early, and had listened to the first service only as a preparation for the more solemn ceremony to follow; nor had they any reason to suspect that Benvenuto and his apprentices were upon the point of cutting all the lines of communication with the house they had so imprudently quitted.

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IX.

THRUST AND PARRY.

THE decisive moment had arrived. Benvenuto divided his men into two detachments: one was to attempt, by every possible means, to force the door of the Hôtel; the other was to cover the operations of the first, and to keep from the walls, with arquebus shots or with their swords, any of the besieged who might appear upon the battlements, or who might attempt a sortie. Benvenuto took command of this last detachment in person, and selected our friend Ascanio for his lieutenant. At the head of the other he placed Hermann, the good-humored, gallant German, who could flatten an iron bar with a hammer, and a man with his fist. He chose for his second in command little Jehan, a rascal of fifteen years, as active as a squirrel, mischievous as a monkey, and impudent as a page, for whom the Goliath had conceived a very deep affection, for the reason, doubtless, that the playful youngster was forever tormenting him. Little Jehan proudly took his place beside his captain, to the great chagrin of Pagolo, who in his double cuirass was not unlike the statue of the Commandeur in the rigidity of his movements.

Having thus made his dispositions, and reviewed his men and inspected their weapons for the last time, Benvenuto addressed a few words to the brave fellows who were about to face danger, perhaps death, in his cause,

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with such good will. Then he grasped each man's hand, crossed himself devoutly, and cried, "Forward!"

The two parties at once took up their line of march, and, skirting the Quai des Augustins, which was deserted at that hour in that spot, they very soon arrived at the Hôtel de Nesle.

Thereupon Benvenuto, unwilling to attack his enemy without first going through all the formalities prescribed by custom in such cases, went forward alone, waving a white handkerchief at the end of his sword, to the same small door as before, and knocked. As before, he was questioned through the barred opening as to the object of his visit. Benvenuto repeated the same formula, saying that he had come to take possession of the château given him by the king. But he was less fortunate than on the former occasion, in that he was not honored with any reply at all.

Thereupon, facing the door, he exclaimed, in loud, distinct tones: —

"To thee, Robert d'Estourville, Provost of Paris, do I, Benvenuto Cellini, goldsmith, sculptor, painter, and engineer, make known that his Majesty François I. has in his good pleasure, as it was his right to do, given to me absolutely the Grand-Nesle. As thou dost insolently maintain thy hold upon it, and, in contravention of the royal will, dost refuse to deliver it to me, I hereby declare to thee, Robert d'Estourville, Seigneur de Villebon, Provost of Paris, that I have come to take possession of the Grand-Nesle by force. Defend thyself therefore, and, if evil comes of thy refusal, know that thou wilt be held answerable therefor on earth and in heaven, before man and before God."

With that Benvenuto paused, and waited; but not a sound came from behind the walls. He thereupon

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loaded his arquebus, and ordered his men to make ready their weapons; then, assembling the leaders Hermann, Ascanio, and Jehan in council, he said to them: —

"You see, my children, that it is not possible to avoid the conflict. Now it is for us to decide in what way we shall begin the attack."

"I will break in the door," said Hermann, "and do you follow me in; that's all."

"With what will you do it, my Samson?" queried Cellini.

Hermann looked about and saw on the quay a piece of timber which four ordinary men would have found it difficult to lift.

"With that beam," he said.

He walked to where it lay, coolly picked it up, placed it under his arm, and fixed it there like a ram in its socket, then returned to his general.

Meanwhile a crowd was beginning to collect, and Benvenuto, excited thereby, was on the point of giving orders for the attack to begin, when the captain of the king's archers, notified doubtless by some conservative citizen, appeared at the corner of the street, accompanied by five or six mounted men. This captain was a friend of the provost, and although he knew perfectly well what was toward, he rode up to Benvenuto, hoping to intimidate him doubtless, and while his people checked Hermann's advance, he said: —

"What is your desire, and why do you thus disturb the peace of the city?"

"The man who really disturbs the peace," replied Cellini, "is he who refuses to obey the king's orders, not he who executes them."

"What do you mean?" inquired the captain.

"I mean that I hold a deed in due form, delivered to

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me by Messire de Neufville, secretary of the royal treasury, wherein his Majesty grants to me the Hôtel du Grand-Nesle. But the people who are in possession refuse to recognize this deed, and thereby keep me from my own. Now in one way or another, I have got it into my head that, since Scripture says that we must render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, Benvenuto Cellini is entitled to take what belongs to Benvenuto Cellini."

"Yes! and instead of preventing us from taking possession of our property, you ought to lend us a hand," cried Pagolo.

"Be silent, rascal," said Benvenuto, stamping angrily; "I have no need of anybody's assistance. Dost thou understand?"

"You are right in theory, but wrong in practice," rejoined the captain.

"How may that be?" demanded Benvenuto, who felt that the blood was beginning to rise in his cheeks.

"You are right to wish to enter into possession of your property, but you are wrong to undertake to do it in this way; for you will not gain much, I promise you, fighting walls with your swords. If I were to give you a little friendly advice, it would be to apply to the officers of justice, and carry your grievance to the Provost of Paris, for example. With that, adieu, and good luck to you!"

And the captain of the king's archers rode away with a sneering laugh, whereupon the crowd laughed too.

"He laughs best who laughs last," said Benvenuto Cellini. "Forward, Hermann, forward!"

Hermann took up his joist once more, and while Cellini, Ascanio, and two or three of the most skilful marksmen of the party, arquebus in hand, stood in readiness to fire upon the wall, he rushed forward like a

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living catapult against the small door, which they deemed to be easier to burst in than the large one.

But when he approached the wall a shower of stones began to rain down upon him, although no defenders could be seen; for the provost had ordered stones to be piled on top of the wall, and it was necessary only to push lightly against the piles to send them down upon the heads of the besiegers.

The latter, being thus warmly received, recoiled a step or two, but, although taken entirely by surprise by this alarming method of defence, no one was wounded save Pagolo; he was so overburdened with his double cuirass that he could not fall back so quickly as the others, and was wounded in the heel.

Hermann himself was no more disturbed by this shower of pebbles than an oak tree by a hail-storm, and kept on to the door, where he at once set to work and began to deal such blows against it that it soon became evident that, stout as it was, it could not long withstand such treatment.

Benvenuto and his men meanwhile stood ready with their arquebuses to fire upon anybody who might appear upon the wall, but no one appeared. The Grand-Nesle seemed to be defended by an invisible garrison, and Benvenuto raged inwardly at his inability to do anything to assist the dauntless German. Suddenly he happened to glance at the old Tour de Nesle, which stood by itself, as we have said, on the other side of the quay, and bathed its feet in the Seine.

"Wait, Hermann," cried Cellini, "wait, my good fellow; the Hôtel de Nesle is ours as surely as my name is Benvenuto Cellini, and I am a goldsmith by trade."

Motioning to Ascanio and his two companions to follow him, he ran to the tower, while Hermann, in obedi-

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ence to his orders, stepped back out of range of the stones, and awaited the fulfilment of the general's promise, leaning upon his timber as a Swiss would lean upon his halberd.

As Benvenuto anticipated, the provost had neglected to station a guard in the old tower, so that he took possession of it unopposed, and, running up the stairs, four at a leap, reached the summit in a moment; the terrace overlooked the walls of the Grand-Nesle, as a steeple overlooks a town, so that the besieged, who a moment before were sheltered by their ramparts, suddenly found themselves entirely unprotected.

The report of an arquebus and the hissing of a bullet, followed by the fall of an archer, warned the provost that the face of affairs was in all probability about to change.

At the same moment Hermann, realizing that he would now have a free field, resumed his joist, and began to batter away again at the door, which the besieged had strengthened somewhat during the momentary suspension of hostilities.

The crowd, with the marvellous instinct of self-possession always noticeable in such bodies, realized that shooting was to form part of the entertainment, and that spectators of the tragedy about to be enacted were likely to be splashed with blood; and they no sooner heard the report of Benvenuto's arquebus and the cry of the wounded archer than they dispersed like a flock of pigeons.

A single individual remained.

This was no other than our friend, Jacques Aubry, the student, who had kept the appointment made the preceding Sunday with Ascanio, in the hope of enjoying his game of tennis.

He had but to cast a glance over the battle-field to understand what was going on.

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It is not difficult to divine the determination arrived at by Jacques Aubry, from what we have already seen of his character. To play at tennis or with fire-arms was equally sport to him; and as he guessed that the besiegers were most likely to be his friends, he enlisted under their banner.

"Well, my boys," he said, walking up to the group which was waiting for the door to be burst in to rush into the citadel, "we are having a bit of a siege, are we? Peste! you 're not attacking a cabin, and it 's a good deal of an undertaking for so few of you to try to take a strong place like this."

"We are not alone," said Pagolo, who was dressing his heel; and he pointed to Benvenuto and his three or four companions, who were keeping up such a well sustained fire upon the wall that the stones were falling much less freely than at first.

"I see, I see, Master Achilles," said Jacques Aubry, "for you are like him in being wounded in the heel, in addition to a thousand other points of similarity, no doubt. I see: yes, there 's my friend Ascanio, and the master doubtless, on top of the tower yonder."

"Very true," said Pagolo.

"And that fellow banging away at the door so lustily is one of you also, is n't he?"

"That 's Hermann," said little Jehan proudly.

"Peste! how he goes on!" said the student. "I must go and congratulate him."

He sauntered along with his hands in his pockets, regardless of the bullets whistling above his head, to the brave German, who kept at his task with the regularity of a machine.

"Do you need anything, my dear Goliath?" said Jacques Aubry. "I am at your service."

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"I am thirsty," replied Hermann, without pausing in his work.

"Peste! I can well believe it; that's thirsty work you're doing there, and I wish I had a cask of beer to offer you."

"Water!" said Hermann, "water!"

"Do you mean that that mild beverage will satisfy you? So be it. The river is at hand, and you shall be served in a moment."

Jacques ran to the river, filled his helmet with water, and took it to the German. He leaned his beam against the wall, swallowed at a draught all that the helmet contained, and handed it back to the student empty.

"Thanks," he said, and, taking up the beam once more, he resumed his work.

An instant later he said, "Go and tell the master to be in readiness, for we are getting on famously here."

Jacques Aubry started for the tower, and in a very few moments he stood between Ascanio and Benvenuto, who were keeping up such a brisk and effective fire that they had already shot down two or three men, and the provost's archers were beginning to think twice before showing themselves upon the walls.

Meanwhile, as Hermann had sent word to Benvenuto, the door was beginning to yield, and the provost resolved to make one last effort; he cheered on his men to such good purpose that the stones began to rain down once more. But two or three arquebus shots speedily calmed anew the ardor of the besieged, who, despite all Messire Robert's promises and remonstrances, coyly remained out of range. Thereupon Messire Robert himself appeared, alone, carrying in his hands an enormous stone, and made ready to hurl it down upon Hermann's head.

But Benvenuto was not the man to allow his retainer

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to be taken by surprise. As soon as he caught sight of the provost rashly venturing where no one else ventured to go, he put his weapon to his shoulder; it would have been all up with Messire Robert, had not Ascanio, just as Cellini pulled the trigger, thrown up the barrel with a quick motion of his hand accompanied by a sharp exclamation, so that the bullet whistled harmlessly through the air. Ascanio had recognized Colombe's father.

As Benvenuto turned furiously upon him to demand an explanation, the stone, thrown with all the force the provost could impart to it, fell full upon Hermann's helmet. Even the enormous strength of the modern Titan was not equal to the task of sustaining such a blow; he relaxed his hold of the timber, threw out his arms as if seeking something to cling to, and, finding nothing within reach, fell to the ground unconscious, with a terrible crash.

Besieged and besiegers simultaneously set up a shout. Little Jehan and three or four comrades who were near Hermann ran to him to carry him away from the wall, and look to his injuries; but the large and small doors of the Hôtel de Nesle opened at the same moment, and the provost, at the head of twelve or fifteen men, darted upon the wounded man, cutting and slashing vigorously, as did all his followers, so that Jehan and his comrades were forced to retreat, although Benvenuto was shouting to them to hold their ground, and that he would come and help them. The provost seized the opportunity; eight of his men lifted Hermann, who was still unconscious, by the arms and legs, and seven took up a position to protect their retreat, so that, while Cellini, Ascanio, and their three or four comrades on the terrace of the tower were hurrying down the four or five flights of stairs which lay between them and the street, Her-

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mann and his bearers re-entered the Grand-Nesle. When Cellini, arquebus in hand, appeared at the door of the tower, the door of the Hôtel was just closing behind the last of the provost's men-at-arms.

There was no disguising the fact that this was a check, and a serious check at that. Cellini, Ascanio, and their comrades had, it is true, disabled three or four of the besieged, but the loss of these three or four men was much less disastrous to the provost, than was the loss of Hermann to Cellini.

The besiegers were dazed for a moment.

Suddenly Ascanio and Cellini looked at each other, as if by a common impulse.

"I have a plan," said Cellini, looking to the left, that is to say, toward the city.

"And so have I," Ascanio rejoined, looking to the right, that is to say, toward the fields.

"I have devised a plan to bring the garrison out of the castle."

"And I a plan to open the door for you, if you do bring them out."

"How many men do you need?"

"A single one will suffice."

"Choose."

"Will you come with me, Jacques Aubry?" said Ascanio.

"To the end of the world, my dear fellow, to the end of the world. But I should n't be sorry to have some sort of a weapon, the end of a sword for instance, or a suspicion of a dagger — four or five inches of steel to feel my way with if occasion requires."

"Oh, take Pagolo's sword," said Ascanio; "he can't use it, for he 's nursing his heel with his right hand and crossing himself with the other."

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"And here's my own dagger to complete your outfit," said Cellini. "Strike with it all you please, young man, but do not leave it in the wound; it would be altogether too handsome a present to the wounded man, for the hilt was carved by myself, and is worth a hundred golden crowns, if it is worth a sou."

"And the blade?" queried Jacques Aubry. "The hilt is very valuable, no doubt, but at such a time the blade is of the greatest importance to my mind."

"The blade is priceless," rejoined Benvenuto; "with it I killed my brother's murderer."

"Bravo!" cried the student. "Come, Ascanio, let's be off."

"I am ready," said Ascanio, winding five or six lengths of rope around his body, and putting one of the ladders over his shoulder, — "I am ready."

The two venturesome youths walked along the quay a hundred yards or thereabouts, then turned to the left, and disappeared around the corner of the wall of the Grand-Nesle, behind the city moat.

Let us leave Ascanio to carry out his scheme, and follow Cellini in the development of his.

The objects upon which his eyes rested, when, as we have said, he looked toward the left, that is, in the direction of the city, were two women, standing amid a group of timid spectators at some little distance, — two women, in whom he thought he recognized the provost's daughter and her governess.

They were in fact Colombe and Dame Perrine, who, after hearing mass, set out to return to the Petit-Nesle, and had come to a stand-still in the crowd, trembling with alarm on account of what they had heard of the siege that was in progress, and of what they saw with their own eyes.

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But Colombe no sooner perceived that there was a momentary cessation of hostilities, which left the road open for her, than, heedless of the entreaties of Dame Perrine, who begged her not to risk her safety in the tumult, she went forward resolutely, impelled by her anxiety for her father, and leaving Dame Perrine entirely free to follow her or to remain where she was. As the duenna was really deeply attached to her charge, she determined to accompany her, notwithstanding her fright.

They left the group just as Ascanio and Jacques Aubry turned the corner of the wall.

Now Benvenuto Cellini's plan may be divined.

As soon as he saw the two women coming toward him, he himself stepped forward to meet them, and gallantly offered his arm to Colombe.

"Have no fear, madame," he said; "if you will deign to accept my arm I will escort you to your father."

Colombe hesitated, but Dame Perrine seized the arm on her side which Benvenuto had forgotten to offer her.

"Take his arm, my dear, take it," she said, "and let us accept this noble knight's protection. Look, look! there is Monsieur le Prévôt, leaning over the wall: he is anxious about us, no doubt."

Colombe took Benvenuto's arm, and the three walked to within a step or two of the door.

There Cellini stopped, and said to the provost in a loud voice, making sure that Colombe's arm and Dame Perrine's were safely within his own: —

"Monsieur le Prévôt, your daughter who is here desires to enter; I trust that you will open the door to her, unless you prefer to leave so charming a hostage in your enemy's hands."

Twenty times within two hours the provost, behind his ramparts, had thought of his daughter, whom he had so

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imprudently allowed to go out, being in considerable doubt as to the possibility of admitting her again. He was hoping that she would be warned in time, and would be wise enough to go to the Grand-Châtelet and await results, when he saw Cellini leave his companions and go to meet two women, in whom he recognized Colombe and Dame Perrine.

"The little fool!" he muttered beneath his breath; "but I can't leave her in the midst of these miscreants."

He opened the wicket, and showed his face behind the grating.

"Well," said he, "what are your terms?"

"These," said Benvenuto. "I will allow Madame Colombe and her governess to enter, but only on condition that you come forth with all your men, and we will then decide our dispute by a fair fight in the open. They who remain in possession of the battle-field shall have the Hôtel de Nesle; '*Væ victis!*' as your compatriot Brennus said."

"I accept," said the provost, "on one condition."

"What is it?"

"That you and your people stand back to give my daughter time to come in and my archers time to go out."

"Agreed," said Cellini; "but do you come out first, and let Madame Colombe go in afterward; when she is safely inside, you will throw the key over the wall to her, and thus leave yourself no opportunity to retreat."

"Agreed," said the provost.

"Your word?"

"On the faith of a gentleman. And yours?"

"On the faith of Benvenuto Cellini."

These terms being agreed upon, the door opened, and the provost's retainers filed out, and drew up in two rows before the door, Messire d'Estourville at their head.

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They were nineteen in all. On the other side, Benvenuto, without Ascanio, Hermann, and Jacques Aubry, had but eight men remaining, and of these Simon-le-Gaucher was wounded, — luckily in the right hand. But Benvenuto was not given to counting his foes; it will be remembered that he did not hesitate to attack Pompeo single-handed, although he was attended by a dozen sbirri. He was only too glad, therefore, to abide by his agreement, for he desired nothing so much as a general and decisive action.

"You may go in now, madame," he said to his fair prisoner.

Colombe flew across the space which lay between the two camps as swiftly as the bird whose name she bore, and threw herself panting into the provost's arms.

"Father! father!" she cried, weeping, "in Heaven's name, do not expose yourself!"

"Go inside!" said the provost sharply, taking her by the arm, and leading her to the door; "'tis your folly that reduces us to this extremity."

Colombe passed through the door, followed by Dame Perrine, to whom fear had lent, if not wings, as to her lovely ward, at least legs, which she thought she had lost ten years before.

The provost closed the door behind them.

"The key! the key!" cried Cellini.

True to his promise, the provost took the key from the lock and threw it over the wall, so that it fell into the courtyard.

"And now," cried Benvenuto, rushing upon the provost and his troop, "every man for himself, and God for us all!"

A terrible struggle ensued, for before the provost's people had time to lower their weapons and fire, Ben-

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venuto with his seven workmen was in their midst, slashing to right and left with the terrible sword which he handled in such masterly fashion, and which, forged by his own hand, met few coats of mail or breastplates able to resist it. The soldiers thereupon cast aside their useless arquebuses, drew their swords, and began to cut and thrust in return. But, despite their numbers and their gallantry, in less time than it takes to write the words, they were scattered all about the square, and two or three of the bravest, wounded so severely that they could fight no longer, were forced to fall back.

The provost saw the danger, and being a brave man, who in his time had achieved some fame as a fighting man, he rushed forward to confront this redoubtable Benvenuto Cellini, whom nobody seemed able to withstand.

"To me!" he cried; "to me, infamous robber! and let us decide the affair! What say you?"

"Oh! I could ask nothing better," replied Benvenuto. "If you will bid your people not to interfere with us, I am your man."

"Stand where you are!" said the provost to his men.

"Let not one of you stir!" said Cellini to his.

And the combatants on either side stood rooted in their places, silent and motionless, like the Homeric warriors, who ceased their own fighting in order to miss no part of a contest between two renowned chiefs.

Thereupon the provost and Cellini, each of whom already held his naked sword in his hand, attacked each other at the same instant.

The provost was a clever fencer, but Cellini's skill in that direction was of the very first order. For ten or twelve years past the provost had not once had occasion to draw his sword. On the other hand, during those same ten or twelve years hardly a day had passed that

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Benvenuto had not had or made an occasion to draw his. At the outset, therefore, the provost, who had counted a little too much upon his own prowess, became conscious of his enemy's superiority.

Cellini, for his part, meeting with a resistance which he hardly anticipated from a man of the robe, exerted all the energy, activity, and cunning of which he was capable. It was a marvellous thing to watch his sword, which, like the triple sting of a serpent, threatened the head and the heart at the same instant, flying from place to place, and hardly giving his adversary time to parry, much less to make a single thrust. And so the provost, realizing that he had to do with one stronger than himself, began to give ground, still defending himself, however. Unluckily for Messire Robert, his back was toward the wall, so that a very few steps brought him up against the door, for which he instinctively aimed, although he was well aware that he had thrown the key over the wall.

When he reached that point he felt that he was lost, and like a wild boar at bay, he summoned all his strength, and delivered three or four lusty blows in such rapid succession that it was Benvenuto's turn to parry: once indeed he was a second too late, and his adversary's blade grazed his breast, despite the excellent coat of mail he wore. But, like a wounded lion bent upon speedy vengeance, Benvenuto, the moment that he felt the sharp point of the sword, gathered himself for a spring, and would have run the provost through with a deadly lunge, had not the door behind him suddenly given way at that moment, so that Messire d'Estourville fell over backwards, and the sword came in contact with the individual who had saved him by opening the door so unexpectedly.

But the result was different from what might have

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been expected, for the wounded man said nothing, while Benvenuto gave utterance to a terrible cry. He had recognized Ascanio in the man whom he had unintentionally wounded. He had no eyes for Hermann or for Jacques Aubry, who stood behind his victim. Like a madman, he threw his arms around the young man's neck, seeking the wound with his eyes and his hand and his mouth, and crying: —

"Slain, slain, slain by my hand! Ascanio, my child, I have killed thee!" and roaring and weeping, as lions roar and weep.

Meanwhile Hermann extricated the provost, unharmed, from between Ascanio's and Cellini's legs, and, taking him under his arm as he might have done with a baby, deposited him in a little house where Raimbault kept his gardening tools. He locked the door upon him, drew his sword, and assumed a posture indicative of his purpose to defend his prisoner against any one who might undertake to recapture him.

Jacques Aubry made but one bound from the pavement to the top of the wall, brandishing his dagger triumphantly, and shouting: "Blow, trumpets, blow! the Grand-Nesle is ours!"

How all these surprising things had come to pass the reader will discover in the following chapter.

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X.

OF THE ADVANTAGE OF FORTIFIED TOWNS.

THE Hôtel de Nesle, on the side bounded by the Pré-aux-Clercs, was doubly defended by its walls and by the city moat, so that on that side it was considered impregnable. Now Ascanio very sensibly reflected that it is seldom deemed necessary to guard what cannot be taken, and he determined to make an attack upon the point where the besieged had not thought of providing against one.

With that object in view he set out with his friend Jacques Aubry, not dreaming that, as he disappeared in one direction, Colombe would appear in the other, and provide Benvenuto with a means of compelling the provost to adopt a course which he was most reluctant to adopt.

Ascanio's scheme was very difficult of execution, and very dangerous in its possible results. He proposed to cross a deep moat, scale a wall twenty-five feet high, and at the end perhaps fall into the midst of the enemy. Not till he arrived at the brink of the moat and of his enterprise did he realize the difficulty of crossing the one and carrying through the other; and then his determination, firm as it was at the outset, wavered for an instant.

Jacques Aubry halted some ten or twelve paces behind his friend, and stood tranquilly gazing from the wall to the moat. Having measured them both with his eye, he said: —

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"I beg you, my dear fellow, to have the kindness to inform me why you bring me hither, unless it be to fish for frogs. Ah! yes, —you glance at your ladder. Very good. I understand. But your ladder is only twelve feet long, while the wall is twenty-five feet high and the moat ten wide, which makes a difference of twenty-three feet, if my reckoning is correct."

Ascanio was taken aback for a moment by this unanswerable arithmetic; but suddenly he cried, striking his forehead with his hand: —

"Ah! I have an idea! Look!"

"Where?"

"There!" said Ascanio; "there!"

"That 's not an idea you are pointing at," rejoined the student, "but an oak tree."

There was in truth a huge oak growing near the outer edge of the moat, the upper branches of which gazed inquisitively over the wall of the Séjour de Nesle.

"What? don't you understand?" cried Ascanio.

"Yes! yes! I begin to see through it now. Yes, it 's the very thing. I see it all. The oak and the wall form part of the arch of a bridge which your ladder will complete: but the abyss yawns beneath, my friend, and an abyss full of mud. The devil! we must n't forget that. I am wearing my best clothes, and Simone's husband is beginning to grumble about giving me credit."

"Help me to hoist the ladder," said Ascanio; "that 's all I ask of you."

"Aha!" said the student, "and I am to stay below! Thanks!"

Each of them seized a branch, and they were soon in the tree. By their united strength they succeeded in pulling the ladder up after them to the top of the tree, where they lowered it like a drawbridge, and found to

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their intense satisfaction that while one end rested firmly upon a stout branch, the other end extended two or three feet beyond the wall.

"But when we are upon the wall, what are we to do?" Aubry inquired.

"Why, when we 're upon the wall we will pull the ladder after us, and go down by it."

"Very good. There is only one trifling difficulty, and that is that the wall is twenty-five feet high, and the ladder only twelve."

"I have provided for that," said Ascanio, unwinding the rope from his body. He then made one end fast to the trunk of the tree, and threw the other over the wall.

"Ah! great man, I understand you," cried Aubry, "and I am proud and happy to break my neck with you."

"Very well! what do you propose to do?"

"Go across," and Aubry prepared to cross the space that lay between them and the wall.

"No, no!" said Ascanio, "it is my place to go first."

"Which finger is wet?" said Aubry, holding out his hand to his companion with two fingers open and two closed.

"So be it," said Ascanio, touching one of the two closed fingers.

"You have won," said Aubry. "Go on: but keep cool, don't get excited."

"Never fear."

Ascanio started out upon the flying bridge, while Jacques Aubry steadied it by sitting upon the end; the ladder was a frail support, but the daring youth was light. The student, hardly daring to breathe, thought that he wavered for an instant; but he passed quickly over the narrow space that separated him from the wall.

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and arrived there safe and sound. He was still in very great danger if any of the besieged should happen to espy him, but his anticipations were verified.

"No one in sight," he shouted to his companion, — "no one!"

"If that is so," said Aubry, "on with the dance!"

And he ventured upon the narrow, trembling path, while Ascanio, putting his whole weight upon the other end of the ladder, repaid the service rendered him. As he was as light and as active as Ascanio, he was at his side in an instant.

Both of them sat astride the wall and drew the ladder across; they then made fast the other end of the rope to it, and lowered it, swinging it out so that the lower end would rest on the ground at a safe distance from the wall; lastly, Ascanio, who had won the privilege of making experiments, took the rope in both hands and slid down until his feet rested upon the topmost round of the ladder; another second and he was on the ground.

Jacques Aubry followed him with similar good fortune, and the two friends found themselves in the garden.

It was plainly advisable for them to act at once. All their manœuvring had taken considerable time, and Ascanio was fearful lest his absence and Aubry's had been prejudicial to the master's interests. Drawing their swords as they ran, they hastened to the door leading into the first courtyard, where the garrison should be, assuming that they had not changed their position. When they reached the door, Ascanio put his eye to the keyhole, and saw that the courtyard was empty.

"Benvenuto has succeeded," he cried; "the garrison has gone out. The hotel is ours!" and he tried to open the door, which proved to be locked.

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Both of the young men put forth all their strength in an effort to force it.

"This way! this way!" exclaimed a voice, which found an echo in Ascanio's heart: "this way, Monsieur!"

He turned and saw Colombe at a window on the ground floor. In two bounds he was at her side.

"Aha!" exclaimed Jacques Aubry, following him; "it seems that we have friends in the citadel! Aha! you did n't tell me that, my boy!"

"Oh! save my father, Monsieur Ascanio!" cried Colombe, without any indication of surprise at the young man's appearance, and as if his presence were the most natural thing in the world. "They are fighting outside, do you know, and it 's all for me, all on my account! O mon Dieu! mon Dieu! grant that they kill not one another!"

"Have no fear," said Ascanio, darting into the apartment, which had a door leading into the little courtyard; "have no fear, I will answer for everything!"

"Have no fear," said Jacques Aubry, following at his heels; "have no fear, we will answer for everything!"

As he entered the room Ascanio heard his name called a second time, but by a voice much less musical than the other.

"Who calls me?" he said.

"I, my young friend," the same voice replied, with a most pronounced Teutonic accent.

"Pardieu!" cried Aubry, "'t is our Goliath! What the deuce are you doing in that hen-roost?" he added, looking through the window of the gardener's shed, at which he saw a face which he recognized as Hermann's.

"I haf found myself here, but I know not how I haf here come. Draw the bolt, that I may go and fight. Quick, quick, quick! my hand itches."

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"There you are!" said the student, rendering Hermann the service he requested.

Meanwhile Ascanio was hurrying toward the door opening on the quay, where he could hear a tremendous clashing of swords. When naught but the thickness of the wood separated him from the combatants, he feared that, if he showed himself at that moment, he might fall into the hands of his enemies, so he first looked out through the grated wicket. There he saw Cellini facing him, eager, excited and thirsting for the blood of his antagonist, and realized that Messire Robert was lost. He picked up the key, which lay on the ground, opened the door quickly, and thinking of nothing save his promise to Colombe, received in his shoulder the blow which, but for him, would inevitably have transfixed the provost.

We have already witnessed the result of that occurrence. Benvenuto, in desperation, threw himself upon Ascanio's neck; Hermann imprisoned the provost in the same cage from which he had just been set free himself; and Jacques Aubry, perched upon the rampart, flapped his wings and crowed lustily in honor of the victory.

The victory was in very truth complete; the provost's people, when their master was made prisoner, did not even try to dispute it, but laid down their arms.

Accordingly the goldsmiths all entered the courtyard of the Grand-Nesle, thenceforth their property, and secured the door behind them, leaving the archers and sergeants outside.

Benvenuto, however, took no part in the latter proceedings; he still held Ascanio in his arms, having removed his coat of mail, torn away his doublet, and finally reached the wound, and was stanching the flow of blood with his handkerchief.

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"My Ascanio, my child!" he said again and again; "wounded, wounded by me! what will thy mother in heaven say? Forgive me, Stefana, forgive me! Art thou in pain? tell me. Does my hand hurt thee? Will this accursed blood never stop? A surgeon, quickly! Pray, will not some one call a surgeon?"

Jacques Aubry ran out of the courtyard at the top of his speed.

"It is nothing, dear master, it is nothing," said Ascanio; "a mere scratch on my arm. — Don't feel so terribly, for I assure you it's nothing."

The surgeon, brought to the hotel by Jacques Aubry five minutes later, confirmed Ascanio's assurance that the wound was not dangerous, although quite deep, and at once set about bandaging it.

"Ah! what a weight you lift from my heart!" said Cellini. "Then I am not thy murderer, dear child! But what is the matter, my Ascanio? thy pulse is beating madly, and the blood rushing to thy face! O Monsieur le Chirurgien, we must take him away from here, — the fever is laying hold of him."

"No, no, master," said Ascanio, "on the contrary I feel much better. Leave me here, leave me here, I implore you!"

"My father?" suddenly inquired a voice behind Benvenuto, which made him jump; "what have you done with my father?"

Benvenuto turned and saw Colombe, pale and rigid, seeking the provost with her glance, as she asked for him with her voice.

"Oh! he is safe and sound, Mademoiselle! safe and sound, thanks be to Heaven!" cried Ascanio.

"Thanks be to this poor boy, who received the blow intended for him," said Benvenuto, "for you may truly

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say that this gallant fellow saved your life, Monsieur le Prévôt. — How 's this? where are you, Messire Robert?" exclaimed Cellini, looking about for the provost, whose disappearance he could not understand.

"He is here, master," said Hermann.

"Where, pray?"

"Here, in the little prison."

"O Monsieur Benvenuto!" cried Colombe, darting to the shed with a gesture of mingled entreaty and reproach.

"Open, Hermann," said Cellini.

Hermann obeyed, and the provost appeared in the doorway, somewhat humiliated by his misadventure. Colombe threw herself into his arms.

"O father! father!" she cried; "are you not wounded? has no harm befallen you?" and as she spoke she looked at Ascanio.

"No," said the provost in his harsh voice, "no, thank Heaven! nothing has happened to me."

"And — and —" queried Colombe, in a faltering tone, "is it true that this youth —"

"I cannot deny that he arrived at just the right time."

"Yes," interposed Cellini, "yes, at the right time to receive the sword thrust which I intended for you, Monsieur le Prévôt. Yes, Mademoiselle Colombe, yes," he added, "you owe your father's life to this brave fellow, and if Monsieur le Prévôt does n't proclaim it from the housetops, he is an ingrate as well as a liar."

"I trust that his rescuer will not have to pay too dearly for his gallantry," rejoined Colombe, blushing at her own audacity.

"O Mademoiselle!" cried Ascanio, "I would gladly have shed all my blood in such a cause!"

"Well, well, Messire le Prévôt," said Cellini, "see

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what tender emotions you have caused to spring up. But Ascanio may not be able to bear the excitement. The bandage is in place, and it would be well for him, I think, to take a little rest now."

What Benvenuto had said to the provost of the service rendered him by the wounded man was no more than the truth; and as every truth has an innate strength of its own, the provost in his heart could but admit that he owed his life to Ascanio. He therefore put a good face on the matter, and approached the wounded man, saying: —

"Young man, an apartment in my hotel is at your service."

"In your hotel, Messire Robert!" exclaimed Cellini, with a laugh, for his good humor returned as his anxiety on Ascanio's account vanished; "in your hotel? Why, do you really wish to begin the battle over again?"

"What!" cried the provost, "do you claim the right to turn my daughter and myself out of doors?"

"By no means, Messire. You now occupy the Petit-Nesle. Very good! keep the Petit-Nesle, and let us live on such terms as good neighbors should. Be good enough, Messire, to make no opposition to Ascanio's being at once made comfortable in the Grand-Nesle, where we will join him this evening. Thereafter, if you prefer war —"

"O father!" cried Colombe.

"No! peace!" said the provost.

"There can be no peace without conditions, Monsieur le Prévôt. Do me the honor to accompany me to the Grand-Nesle, or the favor to receive me at the Petit, and we will draw up our treaty."

"I will go with you, Monsieur," said the provost.

"So be it!"

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"Mademoiselle," said D'Estourville then to his daughter, "be good enough to return to your apartments and await my return there."

Colombe, notwithstanding the harsh tone in which this command was uttered, presented her forehead to her father to kiss, and with a courtesy addressed to everybody present, so that Ascanio might come in for a share of it, she withdrew.

Ascanio followed her with his eyes until she disappeared. As there was nothing further to detain him in the courtyard, he asked to be taken inside. Hermann thereupon took him under the arms as if he were a child, and transported him to the Grand-Nesle.

"On my word, Messire Robert," said Benvenuto, who had also looked after the maiden while she was in sight, "on my word! you were very judicious to send my late prisoner away, and I thank you for the precaution, — on my honor I do. I am free to say that Mademoiselle Colombe's presence might have been prejudicial to my interests by making me too weak, and too willing to forget that I am a victor, to remember simply that I am an artist, — that is to say, a lover of every perfect form and of all divine beauty."

Messire d'Estourville acknowledged the compliment by a decidedly ungracious contortion of his features; he followed the goldsmith, however, without outwardly manifesting his ill-humor, but mumbling dire threats beneath his breath. Cellini, to put the finishing touch to his mortification, begged him to go over his new abode with him. The invitation was conveyed in such courteous terms that it was impossible to decline. The provost therefore accompanied his neighbor, who showed him no mercy, and left not a corner of the garden nor a room in the chateau unvisited.

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"Ah! this is truly magnificent," said Benvenuto when they had finished the tour of inspection, during which they were actuated by widely opposed emotions. "Now, Monsieur le Prévôt, I can understand and excuse your repugnance to give up this property; but I need not say that you will be most welcome whenever you may choose, as to-day, to do me the honor of calling upon me in my poor abode."

"You forget, Monsieur, that I am here to-day for no other purpose than to listen to your conditions and state my own. I am ready to listen."

"How so, Messire Robert? On the contrary, I am at your service. But if you choose to allow me first to make known my wishes to you, you will then be free to give expression to your own."

"Say on."

"First of all, the one essential clause."

"What is that?"

"It is this:—

"ARTICLE I. — Messire Robert d'Estourville doth concede Benvenuto Cellini's right to the property called the Grand-Nesle, doth freely abandon it to him, and doth renounce all claim thereto forever, for himself and his heirs."

"Accepted," said the provost. "But if it should please the king to take from you what he has now taken from me, and to give to some other what he has now given to you, I am not to be held responsible."

"Ouais!" said Cellini, "there's some mischievous mental reservation hidden in that, Monsieur le Prévôt. But no matter; I shall know how to retain what I have won. Let us pass to the next."

"'T is my turn," said the provost.

"That is no more than fair."

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"ARTICLE II. — Benvenuto Cellini agrees to make no attack upon the Petit-Nesle, which is and is to remain the property of Robert d'Estourville; furthermore, he will not even attempt to gain a footing there as a neighbor, and under the guise of friendship."

"Very good," said Benvenuto, "although the clause is by no means conceived in kindness; but if the door is thrown open to me I shall not show myself so devoid of courtesy as to refuse to enter."

"I will give orders to avert that possibility," retorted the provost.

"Let us to the next."

"I continue: —

"ARTICLE III. — The first courtyard, between the Grand and Petit Nesles, shall be common to both estates."

"That is quite right," said Benvenuto, "and you will do me the justice to believe that if Mademoiselle Colombe desires to go out, I shall not keep her a prisoner."

"Oh! never fear: my daughter will go in and out by a door which I undertake to have cut in the wall. I simply wish to make sure of an entrance for carriages and wagons."

"Is that all?"

"Yes," replied Messire Robert. "Apropos," he added, "I trust that you will allow me to remove my furniture."

"That is no more than fair. Your furniture is yours, as the Grand-Nesle is mine. Now, Messire le Prévôt, let us add one more clause to the treaty, — a clause purely benevolent in its purpose."

"State it."

"ARTICLE IV. and last. — Messire Robert d'Estourville and Benvenuto Cellini lay aside all ill-will, and loyally and sincerely agree to abide in peace."

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"I accept the article, but only in so far as it does not bind me to bear aid to you against those who may attack you. I agree to do nothing to injure you, but I do not agree to make myself agreeable to you."

"As to that, Monsieur le Prévôt, you know perfectly well that I can defend myself alone, do you not? If there is no objection now on your part," added Cellini, passing the pen to him, "sign, Monsieur le Prévôt, sign."

"I will sign," said the provost, suiting the action to the word, and each of the contracting parties retained a copy of the treaty.

This formality at an end, Messire d'Estourville returned to the Petit-Nesle, being in great haste to scold poor Colombe for her rash expedition. Colombe hung her head, and let him say what he chose, not hearing a single word of his reproaches; for during all the time that they endured the girl was engrossed by a single longing, to ask her father for news of Ascanio. But it was useless: try as hard as she would, she could not force the wounded youth's name beyond her lips.

While these things were taking place on one side of the wall, on the other side, Catherine, who had been sent for from the church, made her entry into the Grand-Nesle; the fascinating madcap threw herself into Benvenuto's arms, pressed Ascanio's hand, complimented Hermann, made sport of Pagolo, laughed, wept, sang, asked questions, all in the same breath. She had suffered terribly, for the reports of fire-arms had reached her ears and interrupted her prayers again and again. But now everything was all right, everybody had come out safe and sound from the battle, save four dead and three wounded men, and Scozzone's high spirits did homage to both victory and victors.

When the uproar caused by Catherine's arrival had

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subsided in some measure, Ascanio remembered the motive which brought the student to the spot so opportunely. He turned to Benvenuto and said: —

"Master, my comrade Jacques Aubry and I were to try our hands at a game of tennis to-day. In good sooth, I am hardly in condition to be his partner, as our friend Hermann says. He has assisted us so gallantly in our undertaking, however, that I venture to beg you to take my place."

"With all my heart," said Benvenuto; "but you must look to yourself, Master Jacques Aubry."

"I will try, I will try, Messire."

"We shall sup together afterward, and you know that the victor will be expected to drink two bottles more than his vanquished opponent."

"Which means that I shall be carried home dead drunk, Master Benvenuto. *Vive la joie!* this suits me. Ah! the devil! there 's Simone waiting for me, too! Pshaw! I had to wait for her last Sunday. It 's her turn to-day, so much the worse for her."

With that the two seized balls and rackets, and hied them to the garden.

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XI.

OWLS, MAGPIES, AND NIGHTINGALES.

As this was the blessed Sabbath day, Benvenuto did nothing more than play tennis, rest after playing, and inspect his new property. But on the following day the work of moving began, and was fully completed two days later, by virtue of the assistance of his new companions. On the third day Benvenuto resumed his modelling as calmly as if nothing had happened.

When the provost realized that he was definitively vanquished, when he learned that Benvenuto's studio, tools, and workmen were actually installed at the Grand-Nesle, rage took possession of him once more, and he began to plot and plan for vengeance. He was in one of his most wrathful moments when the Vicomte de Marmagne surprised him on the morning of this same third day, Wednesday. Marmagne could not resist the longing to gratify his vanity by triumphing over the sorrows and reverses of his friends, as every man who is a coward and an idiot loves to do.

"Well!" he said, "I told you so, my dear Provost."

"Ah! is it you, Viscount? Good morning."

"Well! was I right or wrong?"

"Alas! right. Are you well?"

"At all events I have no reason to reproach myself in this accursed business. I gave you sufficient warning."

"Has the king returned to the Louvre?"

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"'Nonsense!' you said; 'a workman, a nobody, a fine sight it will be!' You have seen it, my poor friend."

"I asked you if his Majesty has returned from Fontainebleau?"

"Yes, and he keenly regrets not having reached Paris on Sunday, in order to look on from one of his towers at his goldsmith's victory over his provost."

"What is said at court?"

"Why, they say that you were thoroughly whipped."

"Hum!" said the provost, who began to be annoyed by this desultory conversation.

"How was it? Did he really give you such an ignominious whipping?"

"Why —"

"He killed two of your men, did he not?"

"I think so."

"If you wish to replace them, I have two Italian bravos, consummate fighting-men, who are quite at your service. You will have to pay them well, but they are sure men."

"We shall see: I won't say no. If not for myself, I may require them for my son in law, Comte d'Orbec."

"Whatever they may say, I cannot believe that this Benvenuto cudgelled you personally."

"Who says so?"

"Everybody. Some are indignant, like myself; others laugh, like the king."

"Enough! we have not seen the end of this affair."

"Ah! you were very wrong to compromise yourself with such a clown, and for such a paltry affair!"

"I shall fight for my honor henceforth."

"If there had been a woman in the affair, why, you might properly have drawn your sword against such people: but for a mere place to sleep in —"

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"The Hôtel de Nesle is a place for princes to sleep in."

"Agreed; but even so, think of exposing yourself for such a matter to be chastised by a blackguard!"

"Ah! I have an idea, Marmagne," said the provost. "Parbleu! you are so devoted to me that I long to render you a friendly service, and I am delighted to have the opportunity now. For a nobleman, and secretary to the king, you are wretchedly located on Rue de la Huchette, my dear Viscount. Now I recently requested for a friend of mine, from the Duchesse d'Etampes, who refuses nothing that I ask, apartments in such one of the king's palaces as my friend might select. I obtained the privilege for him, not without difficulty, but it so happens that he has been called to Spain on urgent business. I have therefore at my disposal the document signed by the king containing this grant of apartments. I cannot make use of it myself; will you have it? I should be happy to acknowledge thus your services and your generous friendship."

"Dear D'Estourville, how can I ever repay you? It is quite true that I am living in very unsuitable quarters, and I have complained to the king a score of times."

"I shall insist upon one condition."

"What is that?"

"That, inasmuch as you are at liberty to take your choice among all the royal hotels, you will choose —"

"Go on, I am waiting."

"The Hôtel de Nesle."

"Aha! you were laying a trap for me."

"Not at all; and to show you that I am speaking seriously, here is the document, duly signed by his Majesty, with the necessary blanks for the name of the beneficiary,

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and of the place selected. I will write the Hôtel du Grand-Nesle, and leave you to insert such names as you choose."

"But this damned Benvenuto?"

"Is entirely off his guard, relying upon a treaty we entered into and signed. Whoever cares to enter will find the doors open, and if on a Sunday he will find the rooms empty. In any event, it's not a matter of turning Benvenuto out, but simply of sharing the Grand-Nesle with him; for it is quite large enough for three or four families. Benvenuto will hear reason. — Well! what are you doing now?"

"I am writing my names and titles in the grant. Do you see?"

"Beware! Benvenuto is more to be feared than you think."

"Bah! I will take my two fire-eaters and surprise him some Sunday."

"What! compromise yourself with a clown for such a trifling matter?"

"A victor is always right; and then, too, I shall be avenging a friend."

"Good luck to you then; I have given you fair warning, Marmagne."

"Thanks twice over, — once for the gift and once for the warning."

And Marmagne, delighted beyond measure, thrust the precious paper in his pocket, and set out in all haste to make sure of his two bravos.

"Very good!" said Messire d'Estourville, rubbing his hands and looking after him. "Go on, Viscount, and one of two things will come of it, — either you will avenge me for Benvenuto's victory, or Benvenuto will avenge me for your sarcasm, in any case, I shall be the

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gainer. I make my enemies enemies of each other; let them fight and kill; I will applaud every blow on either side, for all will be equally gratifying to me."

Let us now cross the Seine and look in upon the occupants of the Grand-Nesle, and see how they were employing their time, pending the results of the provost's militant hatred.

Benvenuto, in the tranquil confidence of conscious strength, had quietly resumed the work he had in hand, without suspecting or caring for Messire d'Estourville's animosity. His day was divided thus. He rose at daybreak, and went at once to a small, isolated room that he had discovered in the garden, above the foundry, with a window from which one could look obliquely into the flower garden of the Petit-Nesle; there he worked during the forenoon upon the model of a small statue of Hebe. After dinner, that is to say, at one o'clock in the afternoon, he went to the studio and worked at his Jupiter; in the evening, for relaxation, he played a game of tennis, or went for a walk.

Now let us see how Catherine employed her time. She sewed and sang and ran hither and thither, instinct with joyous life, much more at her ease in the Grand-Nesle than at the Cardinal of Ferrara's palace.

Ascanio, whose wound made it impossible for him to work, did not find the time irksome, notwithstanding the activity of his mind, for he was dreaming.

If now, availing ourselves of the thief's privilege of climbing walls, we enter the Petit-Nesle, this is what we shall see there. In the first place, Colombe, in her chamber, dreaming like Ascanio. We beg leave to pause here for the moment; all that we can say is, that, while Ascanio's dreams were rose-colored, poor Colombe's were black as night. And then here is Dame Perrine

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just setting out to market, and we must, if you please, follow her for an instant.

For a long time — so at least it seems to us — we have lost sight of the good dame; indeed, it must be said that courage was not her predominating virtue, and amid the perilous encounters we have described she had purposely kept herself out of sight. But when peace began to bloom once more, the roses reappeared in her cheeks, and as Benvenuto resumed his artistic labors she peaceably resumed her joyous humor, her chattering, her gossip's inquisitiveness, — in a word, the practice of all the excellent housewifely qualities.

Dame Perrine on her way to market was obliged to pass across the common courtyard, for the new door for the Petit-Nesle was not yet made. Now it happened, by the merest chance, that Ruperta, Benvenuto's old maid-servant, was setting out at precisely the same moment to purchase her master's dinner. These two estimable individuals were much too well suited to each other to share the antipathies of their masters; so they walked along together on the best possible terms, and, as talking shortens the longest road by half, they talked.

Ruperta began by inquiring of Dame Perrine the price of various articles, and the names of the dealers in the quarter: from that they passed to more interesting subjects.

"Is your master such a terrible man?" queried Dame Perrine.

"Terrible! when you don't offend him he is as gentle as a Jesus; but, *dame!* when one does n't do as he wishes, I must say that he 's not very agreeable. He is fond, oh! very fond, of having his own way. That 's his mania; and when he once gets a thing in his head, all the five hundred thousand devils in hell can't drive it

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out. But you can lead him like a child by pretending to obey him, and it 's very pleasant to hear him talk. You should hear him say to me, 'Dame Ruperta,' (he calls me Ruperta in his strange pronunciation, although my real name is Ruperte, at your service,) 'Dame Ruperta, this is an excellent leg of mutton, and done to a turn; Dame Ruperta, your beans are seasoned most triumphantly; Dame Ruperta, I look upon you as the queen of governesses,' — and all this so winningly that it touches one to the heart."

"*A la bonne heure!* But he kills people, they say."

"Oh yes! when he 's crossed, he kills very handily. It 's a custom of his country; but it 's only when he 's attacked, and then only in self-defence. Otherwise he is very light-hearted and prepossessing."

"I haven't seen him myself. He has red hair, has n't he?"

"No indeed! His hair is as black as yours and mine, — as mine was, that is. Ah! you have never seen him? Well, just come in casually some time to borrow something, and I 'll show him to you. He 's a handsome man, and would make a superb archer."

"Apropos of handsome men, how is our comely youth to-day? The wounded man, I mean, the attractive young apprentice who received such a terrible wound in saving the provost's life."

"Ascanio? Pray do you know him?"

"Do I know him! He promised my young mistress Colombe and myself to show us his jewels. Remind him of it, if you please, my dear madame. But all this does n't answer my question, and Colombe will be very glad to know that her father's savior is out of danger."

"Oh! you can tell her that he is doing very well. He got up just now. But the surgeon has forbidden his

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leaving his room, although I think a breath of fresh air would do him a world of good. It 's out of the question, though, in this burning sun. Your Grand-Nesle garden is a veritable desert. Not a shaded spot anywhere; no vegetation but nettles and briers, and four or five leafless trees. It 's enormous, but very unpleasant to walk in. Our master consoles himself with tennis, but poor Ascanio is n't well enough yet to hold a racket, and must be bored to death. He 's so active, the dear boy, — I speak of him in that way because he 's my favorite, and is always courteous to his elders. He 's not like that bear of a Pagolo, or Catherine the giddy-pate."

"And you say that the poor fellow — "

"Must be eating his heart out with having to pass whole days on a couch in his bedroom."

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed kind-hearted Dame Perrine, "pray tell the poor boy to come over to the Petit-Nesle, where there is such beautiful shade. I will gladly admit him, although Messire le Prévôt has expressly forbidden it. Why, it would be most virtuous in me to disobey him, in order to benefit the man who saved his life. And you talk of ennui! We are the ones who are drying up with it. The comely apprentice will divert us; he will tell us tales of his Italy, and show us his necklaces and bracelets, and chatter with Colombe. Young folks like to be together and prattle, and they languish in solitude. So it 's agreed, is n't it? Just tell your Benjamin that he 's at liberty to come and walk in our garden whenever he pleases, provided he comes alone, or with you, Dame Ruperte, to give him your arm. Knock four times, the first three gently and the last louder: I shall know what it means, and I will come and open the door."

"Thanks for Ascanio and myself; I will not fail to

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tell him of your amiable offer, and he will not fail to avail himself of it."

"I am delighted to think so, Dame Ruperte."

"*Au revoir*, Dame Perrine! Charmed to have made the acquaintance of such an estimable person."

"The same to you, Dame Ruperte."

The two gossips bowed low to each other, and parted with mutual satisfaction.

The gardens of the Séjour de Nesle were in truth, as Ruperta said, dry and scorched on one side of the wall, cool and shady as a forest on the other. The provost's miserly instinct led him to leave the garden of the Grand-Nesle uncared for, as the cost of keeping it in condition would have been considerable, and he was not sufficiently sure of his title to renew, perhaps for the benefit of his successor, the trees which he had lost no time in cutting down as soon as he took possession. His daughter's presence at the Petit-Nesle accounted for his leaving the shady thickets there untouched, as the poor child had no other recreation than to sit beneath them. Raimbault and his two assistants sufficed to keep Colombe's garden in order, and even to embellish it somewhat.

It was laid out and planted in extremely good taste. At the back was the kitchen garden, Dame Perrine's kingdom; along the wall dividing it from the Grand-Nesle Colombe had her flower garden, called by Dame Perrine the Morning Avenue, because the sun's early rays fell full upon it, and sunrise was the time ordinarily selected by Colombe to water her marguerites and roses. Let us note, in passing, that from the room over the foundry in the Grand-Nesle one could see every movement of the lovely gardener without being seen. Following out Dame Perrine's geographical nomenclature, there was the Noonday Avenue, terminated by a thicket

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where Colombe loved to sit, and read or embroider, during the heat of the day. At the other end of the garden was the Evening Avenue, planted with a triple row of lindens, which made it delightfully cool and fresh: it was here that Colombe was accustomed to walk after supper.

This last named avenue Dame Perrine had in mind as a spot well adapted to hasten the convalescence of the wounded Ascanio. She was very careful, however, to say nothing to Colombe of her charitable intentions. It was possible that she would be too obedient to her father's commands, and would refuse to concur in her governess's open defiance of them. And in that case what would Dame Ruperta think of her neighbor's authority and influence? No; since she had gone so far, perhaps a little recklessly, she must go on to the end. Indeed, the good woman's offence was excusable when we reflect that she had no one but Colombe to whom she could speak from morning till night, and more often than not Colombe was so deeply absorbed in her own thoughts that she did not reply.

The reader will readily understand Ascanio's ecstasy when he learned that paradise was open to him, and how fervently he blessed Ruperta. He insisted upon availing himself of his good fortune on the instant, and Ruperta had all the difficulty in the world in persuading him that he ought at least to wait until evening. He had every reason to believe that Dame Perrine's suggestion was made with Colombe's sanction, and that thought made him mad with joy. With how great impatience, therefore, mingled with vague alarm, did he count the dragging hours! At last, at last, the clock struck five. The apprentices left the studio. Benvenuto had been away since noon, and was believed to have gone to the Louvre.

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Thereupon Ruperta said solemnly to the apprentice, who gazed at her as she had not been gazed at for many a year: —

"Now that the time has come, follow me, young man."

They crossed the courtyard together, and she knocked four times at the door leading into the precincts of the Petit-Nesle.

"Say nothing of this to the master, good Ruperta," said Ascanio, who knew that Cellini was a good deal of a scoffer and sceptic in the matter of love, and did not choose to have his pure flame profaned by his witticisms.

Ruperta was on the point of making inquiries as to the reason for this injunction, which it would be hard for her to obey, when the door opened and Dame Perrine appeared.

"Come in, my fine fellow," she said. "How are you to-day? Pallor becomes you, do you know: it 's a pleasure to look at you. Come in also, Dame Ruperta: take the path to the left, young man, Colombe is just coming down to the garden; it 's the time when she always walks. Do you try and persuade her not to scold me too severely for admitting you."

"What!" cried Ascanio, — "Mademoiselle Colombe does n't know — "

"No indeed! Do you think she would have consented to disobey her father? I have brought her up on correct principles. I disobeyed for both, myself. Faith! I don't care! we can't always live like hermits. Raimbault won't see anything, or, if he does, I have a way to make him hold his tongue; if worse comes to worst, it won't be the first time I have held my own against Monsieur le Prévôt!"

Dame Perrine was very loquacious concerning her master, but Ruperta alone followed her in what she

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said. Ascanio was standing still, listening to nothing save the beating of his heart. He did, however, hear these words, let fall by Dame Perrine as they moved away: —

"This is the path where Colombe walks every evening, and she will soon be here without doubt. You see that the sun won't reach you here, my gallant invalid."

Ascanio expressed his thanks with a gesture, and walked forward a few steps, once more immersed in his reverie, and anticipating what was to come with mingled anxiety and impatience. He heard Dame Perrine say to Ruperta as they walked along, —

"This is Colombe's favorite bench."

And upon that he left the two gossips to continue their walk and their conversation, and sat softly down without a word upon the sacred seat.

What was his purpose? whither was he going? He had no idea. He sought Colombe because she was young and fair, and he was young and fair. No ambitious thought had ever entered his head in connection with her. To be near her was his only desire: for the rest he put his trust in God, or, rather, he did not look so far into the future. There is no to-morrow in love.

Colombe, for her part, had thought more than once, and in spite of herself, of the young stranger who had appeared to her in her loneliness as Gabriel appeared to Mary. To see him once more had been from the first the secret desire of this child, who had hitherto had no desire. But, being abandoned by an inconsiderate father to the guardianship of her own virtue, she was too high-minded not to deal with herself with the severity which noble souls never think themselves free to dispense with unless their will is fettered. She therefore bravely put aside her thoughts of Ascanio, and yet those thoughts

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persisted in forcing a way through the triple ramparts Colombe had built around her heart, more easily than Ascanio made his way through the wall of the Grand-Nesle. So it was that Colombe had passed the three or four days since the engagement, alternating between the fear of not seeing Ascanio again, and alarm at the thought of being in his presence. Her only consolation was to dream of him as she sat at her work or walked in the garden. During the day she shut herself up in her own room, to the despair of Dame Perrine, who was thereby doomed to carry on a perpetual monologue in the abyss of her own thoughts. As soon as the intense heat of the day had gone by, she would go down to the cool, shady path, poetically christened by Dame Perrine the Evening Avenue, and there, sitting on the bench where Ascanio now sat, she would allow the sun to set and the stars to rise, listening and replying to her thoughts, until Dame Perrine came to tell her that it was time to retire.

At the usual hour, then, the young man saw Colombe suddenly appear, book in hand, at the end of the path where he was sitting. She was reading the "Lives of the Saints," a dangerous romance of faith and love, well adapted, perhaps, to prepare one for the cruel sufferings of life, but not, surely, for the cold realities of the world. Colombe did not see Ascanio at first, but started back in surprise when she saw a strange woman with Dame Perrine. At that decisive moment, Dame Perrine, like a determined general, plunged boldly to the heart of the question.

"Dear Colombe," she said, "I know your kind heart so well that I did n't think I needed your express sanction to allow a poor wounded youth, who received his wound in your father's cause, to come and take the air under these trees. You know there is no shade at the Grand-

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Nesle, and the surgeon won't answer for his life unless he can walk an hour every day."

While she was uttering this well intentioned but barefaced falsehood, Colombe suddenly spied Ascanio, and a vivid flush suffused her cheeks. The apprentice, meanwhile, in the presence of Colombe, could hardly summon strength to rise to his feet.

"It was n't my sanction that was necessary, Dame Perrine," said the maiden at last, "but my father's."

As she said these words, sadly but firmly, Colombe reached the stone bench upon which Ascanio had been sitting.

He overheard her, and said, with clasped hands:—

"Forgive me, Madame. I thought—I hoped that your kindness had ratified Dame Perrine's courteous offer; but if it is not so," he continued, in a tone of great gentleness, not unmixed with pride, "I beg you to excuse my involuntary boldness, and I will withdraw at once."

"But it is not for me to decide," replied Colombe hastily, deeply moved. "I am not mistress here. Remain to-day at all events, even if my father's prohibition was meant to extend to him who saved his life: remain, Monsieur, if for nothing else than to receive my thanks."

"O Madame!" murmured Ascanio, "it is for me to thank you, and I do so from the bottom of my heart. But by remaining shall I not interfere with your walk? The place I have taken, too, is ill chosen."

"Not at all," rejoined Colombe mechanically, without apparently paying attention, so embarrassed was she, to the other end of the stone bench.

At that moment Dame Perrine, who had not stirred since Colombe's mortifying reprimand, growing weary of her own immobility and her young mistress's silence, took Dame Ruperta's arm and walked softly away.

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The young people were left alone.

Colombe, whose eyes were fixed upon her book, did not at first observe the departure of her governess, and yet she was not reading, for there was a mist before her eyes. She was still excited and dizzy. All that she was capable of doing, and that she did instinctively, was to conceal her agitation, and repress the violent beating of her heart. Ascanio, too, was beside himself; he was excessively pained when he thought that Colombe desired to send him away, and insanely happy when he fancied that he could detect signs of emotion in his inamorata; and these sudden alternations of emotion in his enfeebled state transported and unnerved him at the same time. He was like one in a swoon, and yet his thoughts followed upon one another's heels with astounding rapidity and force. "She despises me! she loves me!" he said to himself almost in the same breath. He glanced at Colombe, silent and still, and the tears rolled down his cheeks, although he felt them not. Meanwhile a bird was singing in the branches overhead; the leaves were scarcely stirring in the gentle breeze. From the Augustine church the evening Angelus came floating softly downward through the air. Never was July evening more calm and peaceful. It was one of Nature's solemn moments, when the soul enters a new sphere,—one of those moments which seem twenty years, and which one remembers all his life.

The two lovely children, so well suited to each other, had but to move their hands to join them, and yet it seemed as if there were a yawning gulf between them.

After a moment or two Colombe raised her head:—

"You are weeping!" she cried, obeying an impulse stronger than her will.

"I am not weeping," said Ascanio, falling back upon

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the bench; but his hands were wet with tears when he took them from his face.

"It is true," he said, "I am weeping."

"Why, what is the matter? I will call some one. Are you in pain?"

"Only from my thoughts."

"What thoughts, pray?"

"I was thinking that perhaps it would have been better for me to die the other day."

"Die! How old are you, pray, that you should talk thus of dying?"

"Nineteen: but the age of unhappiness is a fit age for death."

"And what of your kindred, who would weep for you?" said Colombe, unconsciously eager for a glimpse into the past of this life, of which she had a confused feeling that the future would be involved with her own.

"I have no father or mother, and there is no one to weep for me save my master, Benvenuto."

"Poor orphan!"

"Yes, an orphan indeed! My father never loved me, and I lost my mother at ten years, just when I was beginning to understand her love and return it. My father — But what am I saying, and what are my father and my mother to you?"

"Oh, yes! Go on, Ascanio."

"Saints in heaven! you remember my name!"

"Go on, go on," whispered Colombe, putting her hands before her face to hide her blushes.

"My father was a goldsmith, and my dear mother was herself the daughter of a Florentine goldsmith, named Raphael del Moro, of a noble Italian family; for in our Italian republics, to work implies no dishonor, and you will see more than one ancient and illustrious name on

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the sign of a shop. My master, Cellini, for example, is as noble as the King of France, if not even more so. Raphael del Moro, who was poor, compelled his daughter Stefana to marry, against her will, a fellow goldsmith almost of his own age, but very wealthy. Alas! my mother and Benvenuto Cellini loved each other, but were both fortuneless. Benvenuto was travelling everywhere to make a name for himself and earn money. He was far away, and could not interfere to prevent the marriage. Gismondo Gaddi (that was my father's name) soon began to detest his wife because she did not love him, although he never knew that she loved somebody else. My father was a man of a violent and jealous disposition. May he forgive me if I accuse him wrongfully, but children have a relentless memory for their wrongs. Very often my mother sought shelter by my cradle from his brutal treatment, but he did not always respect that sanctuary. Sometimes he struck her, may God forgive him! while she held me in her arms: and at every blow my mother would give me a kiss to help deaden the pain. Ah! I remember well both the blows my mother received and the kisses she gave me.

"The Lord, who is just, dealt a blow at my father where he would feel it most keenly, — in his wealth, which was dearer to him than anything else in the world. Disaster after disaster overwhelmed him. He died of grief because his money was all gone, and my mother died a few days after, because she thought that she was no longer beloved.

"I was left alone in the world. My father's creditors laid hands upon all that he left, and, in all their ferreting to make sure that they had forgotten nothing, they failed to discover a little weeping child. An old maid-servant who was fond of me kept me two days from

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charity, but she was living on charity herself, and had none too much bread for her own needs.

"She was uncertain what to do with me, when a man covered with dust entered the room, took me in his arms, embraced me, weeping, and, having given the good old woman some money, took me away with him. It was Benvenuto Cellini, who had come from Rome to Florence expressly to find me. He cherished me, instructed me in his art, and kept me always with him, and, as I say he is the only one who would weep for my death."

Colombe listened with lowered eyes and oppressed heart to the orphan's story, which in the matter of loneliness was her own, and to the story of the poor mother's life, which would perhaps be hers some day; for she too was doomed to marry against her will a man who would hate her because she would not love him.

"You are unjust to God," she said to Ascanio; "there is some one, your kind master at least, who loves you, and you knew your mother. I cannot remember my mother's kisses, for she died in giving birth to me. I was brought up by my father's sister, a crabbed, ill-tempered woman, and yet I mourned her bitterly when I lost her two years ago, for in the absence of any other affection my heart clung to her as ivy clings to a cliff. For two years I have been living in this place with Dame Perrine, and notwithstanding my loneliness, and although my father comes very rarely to see me, these two years have been and will be the happiest of my whole life."

"You have indeed suffered much," said Ascanio, "but though the past has been so painful, why do you dread the future? Yours, alas! is full of glorious promise. You are nobly born, rich, and beautiful, and the shadow of your early years will only bring out in bolder relief the splendor of the rest of your life."

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There was then some one in the world whose happiness depended upon her, whom she could make glad or sad with a word! Every one exults in his own power. The insolent airs of Comte d'Orbec had humiliated Colombe very recently. The hapless prisoner — forgive her, pray! — could not resist the longing to see the joyful light shine in Ascanio's eyes, so she said, with a blush and a smile, —

"Dame Perrine, what is this you have persuaded me to do?"

Ascanio tried to speak, but could only clasp his hands effusively; his knees trembled under him.

"Thanks, fair lady!" said Ruperta, with a deep courtesy. "Come, Ascanio, you are still weak, and it is time to go in. Give me your arm, and let us go."

The apprentice could hardly muster strength to say "Adieu" and "Thanks!" but he supplemented his words with a look in which his heart spoke volumes, and meekly followed the servant, his whole being overflowing with joy.

Colombe fell back upon the bench, absorbed in thought, and conscious of a pleasurable excitement, for which she reproached herself, and which was entirely unfamiliar to her.

"Until to-morrow!" said Dame Perrine, triumphantly, as she took leave of her guests after escorting them to the door; "if you choose, young man, you can come in this way every day for three months."

"And why for three months only?" asked Ascanio, who had dreamed of coming always.

"*Dame!*" was Dame Perrine's reply, "because in three months Colombe is to marry Comte d'Orbec.

Ascanio needed all the strength of his will to keep from falling.

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"Colombe to marry Comte d'Orbec!" he muttered. "O mon Dieu! mon Dieu! so I deceived myself! Colombe does not love me!"

As Dame Perrine closed the door behind him at that moment, and Dame Ruperta was walking in front of him, neither of them overheard.

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XII.

THE KING'S QUEEN.

We have said that Benvenuto left the studio about noon without saying whither he was going. He went to the Louvre to return the visit François I. paid him at the Cardinal of Ferrara's hotel.

The king had kept his word. The name of Benvenuto Cellini was given to all the doorkeepers and ushers, and all the doors flew open before him, — all the doors save one, that leading to the council chamber. François was discussing affairs of state with the first men in his realm, and, although the king's orders were explicit, they dared not introduce Cellini in the midst of the momentous session then in progress without further instructions from his Majesty.

In truth, France was at this time in a critical situation. We have thus far said but little of affairs of state, feeling sure that our readers, especially those of the gentler sex, would prefer affairs of the heart to politics; but we have at last reached a point where we can no longer draw back, and where we must needs cast a glance, which we will make as brief as possible, at France and Spain, or rather at François I. and Charles V., for in the sixteenth century kings were nations.

At the period at which we have arrived, by virtue of one of the periodical movements of the political see-saw, of which both so often felt the effects, François's situation had recently improved, and Charles's grown worse

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in equal degree. In fact, things had changed materially since the Treaty of Cambrai, which was negotiated by two women, Margaret of Austria, aunt of Charles V., and the Duchesse d'Angoulême, mother of François I. This treaty, which was the complement of the treaty of Madrid, provided that the King of Spain should cede Burgundy to the King of France, and that the King of France should renounce his claim to the homage of Flanders and Artois. Furthermore, the two young princes, who served as hostages for their father, were to be sent back to him in exchange for the sum of two millions of golden crowns. Lastly, good Queen Eleanora, Charles V.'s sister, who was promised at first to the Constable (Bourbon) as a reward for his treachery, and was afterwards married to François as a pledge of peace, was to return to the court of France with the two children, to whom she had been as affectionate and devoted as any mother. These stipulations were carried out with equal good faith on both sides.

But it will readily be believed that François's renunciation of his claim to the Duchy of Milan, exacted from him during his captivity, was only momentary. He was no sooner a free man once more, no sooner restored to power and health, than he turned his eyes again toward Italy. It was with the object of procuring countenance of his claims at the Court of Rome that he had married his son Henri, become Dauphin by the death of his elder brother François, to Catherine de Medicis, niece of Pope Clement VII.

Unfortunately, just at the moment when all the preparations for the king's meditated invasion were completed, Clement VII. died, and was succeeded by Alexander Farnese, who ascended the throne of St. Peter under the name of Paul III.

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Now Paul III. was determined not to allow himself to be inveigled into supporting the party of the Emperor, or of the King of France, but to adhere strictly to the policy of holding an equal balance between them.

With his mind at ease in that direction, the Emperor laid aside all anxiety on the subject of the preparations of France, and busied himself fitting out an expedition against Tunis, which had been seized by the corsair Cher-Eddin, so famous under the name of Barbarossa, who, having driven out Muley Hassan, had taken possession of the country, and was laying Sicily waste.

The expedition was entirely successful, and Charles V., after destroying three or four ships, sailed into the Bay of Naples in triumph.

There he received tidings which tended to encourage him still more. Charles III., Duke of Savoy, although he was the maternal uncle of François I., had followed the counsel of his new wife, Beatrice, daughter of Emmanuel of Portugal, and had abandoned the party of the King of France; so that when François, by virtue of his former treaties with Charles III., called upon him to receive his troops, the Duke of Savoy answered by refusing to do so, and François was reduced to the unenviable necessity of forcing the passage of the Alps, which he had hoped to find open to him by favor of his ally and kinsman.

But Charles V. was awakened from his feeling of security by a veritable thunder-clap. The king marched an army into Savoy so promptly that the duke found his province actually under occupation by the French troops before he suspected that it was invaded. Biron, who was in command of the army, seized Chambéry, appeared upon the Alpine passes, and threatened Piedmont just as Francesco Sforza, terror-stricken doubtless by the news

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of Biron's success, died suddenly, leaving the Duchy of Milan without an heir, and thereby not only making its conquest an easy matter for François, but giving him a strong claim to it as well.

Biron marched down into Italy, and seized Turin. There he halted, pitched his camp on the banks of the Sesia, and awaited developments.

Charles V. meanwhile had left Naples for Rome. The victory he had won over the long-time enemies of Christ procured him the honor of a triumphal entry into the capital of Christendom. This entry intoxicated the Emperor to such a point, that, contrary to his custom, he went beyond all bounds, and in full consistory accused François I. of heresy, basing the accusation upon the protection he accorded the Protestants, and upon his alliance with the Turks. Having recapitulated all their former causes of disagreement, wherein, according to his view, François was always the first at fault, he swore to wage a war of extermination against his brother-in-law.

His disasters in the past had made François as prudent as he formerly was reckless. And so, as soon as he found himself threatened at one time by the forces of Spain and of the Empire, he left D'Annebaut to guard Turin, and called Biron back to France, with orders to devote himself entirely to protecting the frontiers.

Those who were familiar with the chivalrous and enterprising character of François were at a loss to understand this retrograde movement, and supposed from his taking one backward step that he considered himself whipped in advance. This belief still further exalted the pride of Charles V.; he took command of his army in person, and resolved upon invading France from the south.

The results of this attempted invasion are well known.

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Marseilles, which had held out against the Connétable de Bourbon and the Marquis of Pescara, the two greatest soldiers of the time, had no difficulty in holding out against Charles V., a great politician, but of only moderate capacity as a general. Charles was not discouraged, but left Marseilles behind, and attempted to march upon Avignon; but Montmorency had constructed an impregnable camp between the Durance and the Rhone, against which Charles expended his force to no purpose. So that, after six weeks of fruitless endeavor, repulsed in front, harassed upon the flanks, and in great danger of having his retreat cut off, he ordered a retreat which strongly resembled a rout, and, having narrowly escaped falling into his enemy's hands, succeeded with great difficulty in reaching Barcelona, where he arrived without men or money.

Thereupon all those who were awaiting the issue of his expedition to declare themselves declared against Charles V. Henry VIII. cast off his wife, Catherine of Aragon, in order to espouse his mistress, Anne Boleyn Soliman attacked the kingdom of Naples and Hungary. The Protestant princes of Germany entered into a secret league against the Emperor. Lastly, the people of Ghent, weary of the incessant burdens imposed upon them to defray the expense of the war against France, suddenly rose in revolt, and sent ambassadors to François to invite him to place himself at their head.

But amid this universal upheaval, which threatened to destroy the Emperor's fortunes, new negotiations were entered upon by the King of France and himself. The two monarchs had an interview at Aigues-Mortes, and François, bent upon peace, which he felt to be an absolute necessity for France, was determined thenceforth to rely upon friendly negotiations to effect his objects, and not upon an armed struggle.

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He therefore caused Charles to be informed of the proposition of the men of Ghent, offering him at the same time liberty to pass through France on his way to Flanders.

The council had been called together to discuss this subject, when Benvenuto knocked at the door, and François, true to his promise, as soon as he was advised of the great artist's presence, ordered that he be admitted. Benvenuto therefore heard the end of the discussion.

"Yes, messieurs," François was saying, "yes, I agree with Monsieur de Montmorency, and it is my dream to conclude a lasting alliance with the Emperor elect, to raise our two thrones above all the rest of Christendom, and to wipe out all these corporations, communes, and popular assemblies which assume to set bounds to our royal power by refusing us to-day the arms, to-morrow the money, of our subjects. My dream is to force back into the bosom of the true religion all the heresies which distress our holy Mother Church. My dream is, lastly, to unite all our forces against the enemies of Christ, to drive the Turkish Sultan from Constantinople, were it only to prove that he is not, as he is alleged to be, my ally, and to establish at Constantinople a second empire rivalling the first in power, in splendor, and in extent. That is my dream, messieurs, and I have given it that name so that I may not allow myself to be unduly exalted by hope of success, nor unduly cast down if the future shall demonstrate, as it may, its impracticability. But if it should be fulfilled, constable, if it should be fulfilled, if I were to have France and Turkey, Paris and Constantinople, the Occident and the Orient, confess, messieurs, that it would be grand, — that it would be sublime!"

"I understand, then, Sire," said the Duc de Guise,

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"that it is definitely decided that you decline the suzerainty proffered you by the Ghentese, and that you renounce the former domains of the house of Burgundy?"

"It is so decided: the Emperor shall see that I am an ally as loyal as I am a loyal foe. But first of all, and in any event, I desire and shall demand that the Duchy of Milan be restored to me: it belongs to me by hereditary right and by imperial investiture, and I will have it, on my honor as a gentleman, but, I trust, without breaking with my brother Charles."

"And you will offer to allow Charles V. to pass through France on his way to Ghent to chastise the rebels?" asked Poyet.

"Yes, Monsieur le Chancelier," was the king's reply; "despatch M. de Fréjus to-day to extend the invitation in my name. Let us show him that we are disposed to go any length to maintain peace. But if he prefers war —"

A majestic, awe-inspiring gesture accompanied this phrase, interrupted for an instant as François caught sight of his artist standing modestly near the door.

"But if he prefers war," he resumed, "by my Jupiter, of whom Benvenuto brings me news, I swear that it shall be war bloody, desperate, and terrible! Well, Benvenuto, where is my Jupiter?"

"Sire," replied Cellini, "I bring you the model of your Jupiter: but do you know of what I was dreaming as I looked at you and listened to you? I was dreaming of a fountain for your Fontainebleau,—a fountain to be surmounted by a colossal statue sixty feet high, holding a broken lance in its right hand, and with the left resting on its sword hilt. This statue, Sire, should represent Mars, — that is to say, your Majesty; for your nature is all courage, and you use your courage judi-

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ciously, and for the defence of your glory. Stay, Sire, that is not all: at the four corners of the base of the statue there should be four seated figures, — Poetry, Painting, Sculpture, and Generosity. Of that I was dreaming as I looked at you and listened to you, Sire."

"And you shall cause your dream to live in marble or bronze, Benvenuto: such is my wish," said the king in a commanding tone, but with a cordial, kindly smile.

All the members of the council applauded, for all deemed the king worthy of the statue, and the statue worthy of the king.

"Meanwhile," said the king, "let us see our Jupiter."

Benvenuto drew the model from beneath his cloak, and placed it upon the table, around which the destiny of the world had so recently been debated.

François gazed at it for a moment with undisguised admiration.

"At last!" he cried, "at last I have found a man after my own heart. My friend," he continued, laying his hand upon Benvenuto's shoulder, "I know not which of the two experiences the greater happiness, the prince who finds an artist who thoroughly sympathizes with and understands all his ideas, such an artist as yourself in short, or the artist who meets a prince capable of appreciating him. I think that my pleasure is the greater, upon my word."

"Oh no, Sire, permit me!" cried Cellini; "surely mine is much the greater."

"No, mine, Benvenuto."

"I dare not contradict your Majesty, and yet — "

"Let us say that we experience an equal amount of pleasure, my friend."

"You have called me your friend, Sire," said Benvenuto; "that is a word which pays me a hundred times

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"I admit it," said Benvenuto.

"Very well, go and say so to herself, and not to me. I ask nothing more than that to make you the best friends in the world. You have wounded her by some artist's whim, and it is your place to make the first advances toward her."

"If I wounded her," said Cellini, "I did it unintentionally, or rather without malice. She said some bitter words to me which I did not deserve; I put her back where she belonged, and she did deserve it."

"Never mind, never mind! forget what she said, Benvenuto, and make her forget your reply. I tell you again she is imperious and vindictive, and she has the king's heart in her hand, — a king who loves art, it is true, but who loves love more. She will make you repent your audacity, Benvenuto; she will make enemies for you; she it was who inspired the provost with courage to resist you. And listen: I am just setting out for Italy; I am going to Rome by her command; and my journey, Benvenuto, is aimed at you, — I, your friend, am compelled to become the instrument of her spleen."

"What are you to do at Rome?"

"What am I to do there? You have promised the king to emulate the ancients, and I know that you are a man to keep your promise. But the duchess thinks you a braggart, and with a view of crushing you by the comparison no doubt, she is sending me, a painter, to Rome to make casts of the most beautiful of the ancient statues, the Laocoön, the Venus, the Knife-Grinder, and God knows what!"

"That is, indeed, refinement of hatred," said Benvenuto, who, notwithstanding his good opinion of himself, was not altogether confident of the result of a comparison of his work with that of the great masters;

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"but to yield to a woman," he added, clenching his fists, "never! never!"

"Who spoke of yielding? I will show you an excellent way to accomplish it. She is pleased with Ascanio; she wishes to employ him, and has instructed me to bid him call upon her. Now, nothing could be simpler than for you to accompany your pupil to the Hôtel d'Etampes and introduce him yourself to the fair duchess. Seize the opportunity; take with you one of those marvellous jewels which you alone can make, Benvenuto; show it to her first, and when you see her eyes glisten as she looks at it, offer it to her as an unworthy tribute to her beauty. She will accept, will thank you gracefully, and will in return make you some present worthy of you and take you back into favor. If, on the other hand, you have that woman for an enemy, abandon henceforth all the great things of which you are dreaming. Alas! I too have been compelled to stoop for a moment, only to rise to my full stature immediately. Until then that dauber Rosso was preferred to me; he was put forward everywhere, and always over my head. They made him Intendant of the Crown."

"You are unjust to him, Francesco," said Cellini, unable to conceal his real thought; "he is a great painter."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"And so am I sure of it," said Primaticcio, "and that is just why I hate him. They were using him to crush me; I flattered their wretched vanity, and now I am the great Primaticcio, and they are using me to crush you. Do as I did, therefore, Benvenuto; you will never repent having followed my advice. I implore you for your own sake and mine, I implore you in the name

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of your renown and your future, both of which you will compromise if you persist in your obstinacy."

"It is hard," said Cellini, who was, however, perceptibly weakening in his determination.

"If not for yourself, Benvenuto, for the sake of our great king. Do you wish to tear his heart by compelling him to choose between a mistress he adores, and an artist he admires?"

"Very well! so be it! For the king's sake I will do it!" cried Cellini, overjoyed to find a pretext which would spare his self-esteem.

"*A la bonne heure!*" said Primaticcio. "You understand, of course, that if a single word of this conversation should be repeated to the duchess, it would cause my ruin."

"Oh! I trust that you have no fears on that score."

"If Benvenuto gives his word, all is said."

"You have it."

"In that case, adieu, brother."

"A pleasant journey to you."

"And good luck to you."

The two friends, having exchanged a cordial grasp of the hand, parted, each with a gesture which summarized their whole conversation.

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XIII.

SOUVENT FEMME VARIE.

The Hôtel d'Etampes was not far from the Hôtel de Nesle. Our readers will not be surprised therefore at our rapid flight from one to the other.

It was located near the Quai des Augustins, and extended the whole length of Rue Gilles-le-Gueux, which was at a later date sentimentally christened Rue Gît-le-Cœur. The principal entrance was upon Rue de l'Hirondelle. François I. had presented it to his mistress to induce her to become the wife of Jacques Desbrosses, Comte de Penthièvre, as he had given the dukedom of Etampes and the government of Bretagne to Jacques Desbrosses, Comte de Penthièvre, to induce him to marry his mistress.

The king had spared no pains to render his gift worthy of the lovely Anne d'Heilly. He had caused the old edifice to be refurbished and made over according to the latest style.

Upon its frowning façade the delicate flowers of the Renaissance sprang into life by magic, like so many thoughts of love. It was evident from the zeal displayed by the king in the decoration of this princely abode, that he anticipated passing almost as much of his time there as the duchess herself. The apartments were furnished with royal magnificence, and the whole establishment was upon the footing of that of a real queen,

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much more extensive and luxurious, indeed, than that of the chaste and kindly Eleonora, sister of Charles V. and the lawful wife of François I., who was a personage of so little importance in the world, as well as at the French court.

If we are so indiscreet as to make our way into the duchess's sleeping apartment early in the morning, we shall find her half reclining upon a couch, her charming head supported by one of her lovely hands, and passing the other carelessly through her chestnut locks, which shone with a golden light. Her bare feet seem even smaller and whiter than they really are in her wide black velvet slippers, and her floating, *négligée* morning gown lends an irresistible charm to the coquette's fascinations.

The king is in the room, standing by a window, but he is not looking at his duchess. He is tapping his fingers rhythmically against the glass, and seems to be deep in meditation. He is thinking, no doubt, of the momentous question of Charles V.'s journey through France.

"Pray what are you doing there, Sire, with your back turned?" the duchess finally asks, petulantly.

"Making verses for you, my love, and they are finished at last, I believe."

"Oh, repeat them to me quickly, I pray you, my gallant crowned poet!"

"That I will," the king replies, with the confidence of a laurel-crowned rhymer. "Listen: —

'Etant seul et auprès d'une fenêtre,
Par un matin comme le jour peignait,
Je regardais Aurore à main senestre,
Qui à Phœbus le chemin enseignait,
Et d'autre part ma mie qui peignait
Son chef doré, et vis ses luisans yeux,

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Dont un jeta un trait si gracieux,
Qu'à haute voix je fus contraint de dire;
Dieux immortels! rentrez dedans vos cieux,
Car la beauté de ceste vous empire!'"[1]

"Oh, the lovely verses!" says the duchess, clapping her hands. "Look at Aurora to your heart's content: henceforth I 'll not be jealous of her, since to her I owe such charming verses. Say them to me once again, I beg."

François obligingly repeated his flattering lines, for his own benefit as well as hers, but this time Anne said nothing.

"What is the matter, my fair siren?" said François, who expected a second compliment.

"The matter is, Sire, that I am considering whether I will say to you again even more emphatically what I said last evening: a poet has even less pretext than a knightly king for allowing his mistress to be insulted, for she is at the same time his mistress and his Muse."

"Again, naughty one!" rejoined the king with an impatient gesture: "an insult indeed, bon Dieu! Your wrath is implacable, in good sooth, my nymph of nymphs, when it leads you to neglect my verses."

"Monseigneur, I hate as warmly as I love."

[1] Standing alone beside my window,
One morning as the day was breaking,
I saw at my left hand Aurora
To Phœbus pointing out his daily road;
And on the other hand my sweetheart combing
Her golden locks; I saw her beaming eyes
That shone so lovingly upon me,
That I was fain to cry aloud:
"Immortal Gods! return to your abodes celestial,
Her loveliness doth put yours to the blush."

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"And yet suppose I were to beg you to lay aside your animosity to Benvenuto, — a great fool, who knows not what he says, who talks just as he fights, heedless of consequences, and who had not, I swear, the slightest purpose to wound you. You know, moreover, that clemency 's the attribute of goddesses, dear goddess mine, so pray forgive the simpleton for love of me!"

"Simpleton, indeed!" muttered Anne.

"Oh, a sublime simpleton, I grant you!" said François: "I saw him yesterday, and he promised to do marvellous things. He is a man, I verily believe, who has no rival in his art, and will hereafter shed as much lustre on my reign as Andrea del Sarto, Titian, and Leonardo da Vinci. You know how I love my artists, dearest duchess, so be complaisant and indulgent to him, I beg you. Mon Dieu! an April shower, a woman's caprice, and an artist's whim have more of fascination than of ennui for me. Come, come, do you, whom I do love so dearly, pardon at my bidding."

"I am your servant, Sire, and I will obey you."

"Thanks. In return for this favor accorded by the woman's kindly heart, you may demand such gift as pleases you that lies within the prince's power to bestow. But, alas! 't is growing late, and I must leave you. The council meets again to-day. 'T is an insufferable bore! Ah! my good brother Charles makes the king's trade most irksome to me. With him cunning replaces chivalry, the pen the sword; and 't is a burning shame. Upon my soul, I think we need new words to be devised for all this science and erudition of government. Adieu! my poor beloved. I will do my best to be adroit and clever. You are very fortunate, my dear, for you have only to remain beautiful, and Heaven has made that an easy task for you. Adieu! nay, do not rise, my page is

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waiting for me in the antechamber. *Au revoir*, and think of me."

"As always, Sire."

François waved a last farewell to her with his hand, raised the hangings, and went out, leaving the fair duchess alone; and she, true to her promise, began at once, if we must say it, to think of other things.

Madame d'Etampes was of an impulsive, active, ambitious nature. Having eagerly sought and gallantly won the king's love, it was not long before that love ceased to satisfy her restless spirit, and she began to suffer from ennui. Neither Admiral Biron, nor the Comte de Longueval, whom she loved for some time, nor Diane de Poitiers, whom she always hated, furnished a sufficient amount of excitement for her needs; but within a week the void in her heart had been measurably filled, and she had begun to live again, thanks to a new hate and a new love. She hated Cellini and loved Ascanio, and she was thinking of one or the other while her women were completing her toilet.

When she was fully dressed except as to her headgear, the Provost of Paris and the Vicomte de Marmagne were announced.

They were among the most devoted partisans of the duchess in the warfare which existed at court between the Dauphin's mistress, Diane de Poitiers, and herself. One is naturally glad to see one's friends when thinking of one's enemies, and the manner of Madame d'Etampes was infinitely gracious as she gave the scowling provost and the smiling viscount her hand to kiss.

"Messire le Prévôt," she began, in a tone in which unfeigned wrath was blended with compassion that contained no suggestion of offence, "we have been informed of the infamous treatment you have received from this

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Italian clown, — you, our best friend, — and we are extremely indignant."

"Madame," replied D'Estourville, neatly turning his misfortune into an occasion for flattery, "I should have been ashamed if one of my years and character had been spared by the villain who was not deterred by your beauty and charm."

"Oh!" said Anne, "I think only of you; as to the insult to me personally, the king, who is really too indulgent to these insolent foreigners, has begged me to forget it, and I have done so."

"In that case, madame, the request we have to make will doubtless be but ill received, and we ask your permission to withdraw without stating it."

"What, Messire d'Estourville! am I not at your service at all times, and whatever may happen? Speak! speak! or I shall lose my temper with so distrustful a friend."

"Very well, madame, this is what we have to say. I had believed that I might dispose of this grant of lodgings which I owe to your munificence in favor of the Vicomte de Marmagne, and naturally we cast our eyes upon the Hôtel de Nesle, which has fallen into such bad hands."

"Aha!" said the duchess. "You interest me immensely."

"The viscount, madame, accepted my suggestion in the first place with the utmost enthusiasm; but now, upon reflection, he hesitates, and thinks with terror of the redoubtable Benvenuto."

"Pardon me, my good friend," the viscount interposed, — "pardon me, you explain the matter very ill. I am not afraid of Benvenuto, but of the anger of the king. I have no fear of being killed by the Italian clown, to

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use madame's words,— no, no! What I fear, so to speak, is that I may kill him, and that some ill may come to me for having deprived our lord and master of a servitor by whom he seems to set great store."

"I ventured to hope, madame, that, in case of need, your protection would not fail him."

"It has never yet failed my friends," said the duchess; "and, furthermore, have you not on your side a better friend than I, — justice? Are you not acting in accordance with the king's will?"

"His Majesty," Marmagne replied, "did not himself designate the Hôtel de Nesle as the abode of any other than Benvenuto, and our choice, under those circumstances, would seem very much like revenge,— there 's no denying it. And then, suppose that I kill this Cellini, as I can promise to do, for I shall have two sure men with me?"

"Oh! mon .Dieu!" exclaimed the duchess, showing her white teeth as she smiled, "the king's protection extends to living men, but I fancy that he takes but little thought to avenge the dead, and when his admiration for art is deprived of this particular subject, he will remember naught save his affection for me, I trust. The man insulted me publicly and outrageously, Marmagne! do you forget it?"

"But, madame," rejoined the prudent viscount, "be very sure that you know all you will have to defend."

"Oh, you are perfectly clear, viscount."

"Nay, madame, if you will permit me, I do not wish to leave you in ignorance upon any point. It may be that force will fail to effect our purpose with this devil of a man. In that event, we shall have recourse to stratagem; if he escapes my bravos in his Hôtel in broad daylight, they will meet him again some night by

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d'Orbec, I believe? — a beautiful *parti*, in sooth. Fine, I should have said, not beautiful.[1] Pray, sit you down, messire! Do you know that my consent is needful for this marriage, and you 've not asked it yet, but I will give it you. D'Orbec is as devoted to me as yourself. I hope that we are at last to see your lovely child, and have her for our own, and that her husband will not be so ill advised as not to bring her to court. What is her name, messire?"

"Colombe, madame."

"A sweet, pretty name. 'T is said that one's name has an influence upon one's destiny: if it be so, the poor child should have a tender heart, and be foredoomed to suffer. Well, Isabeau, what is it now?"

"Nothing, madame; he said that he would wait."

"Ah, yes! 't is well. I had forgotten him already. Yes, yes, messire, I say again, keep your eye on Colombe; the count 's a husband of the same sort as mine, as ambitious as the Duc d'Etampes is avaricious, and quite capable of exchanging his wife for some duchy. And then you must be beware of me as well, especially if she 's as pretty as she 's said to be! You will present her to me, will you not, messire? 'T will be no more than fair, so that I may be prepared to defend myself."

The duchess, exultant in anticipation of her triumph, ran on thus for a long while with apparent unconcern, although her impatient joy could be discerned in her every movement.

"Well, well," she said at last, "another half-hour and the two hours will have passed; then we will release poor Benvenuto from his agony. Put yourselves in his place; he must suffer terribly, for he is little wonted to

[1] "Je dis *beau*, c'est *bon* que je devrais dire."

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this sort of sentry-go. To him the Louvre is always open, and the king always visible. In truth, I pity him, although he well deserves it. He must be gnashing his teeth, must he not? And then to be unable to give vent to his anger. Ha! ha! ha! I shall have many a hearty laugh over this. But what is that I hear? Bon Dieu! all that shouting and uproar!"

"May it not be that the soul of the damned is wearying of Purgatory?" suggested the provost, with renewed hope.

"I propose to go and see," said the duchess, turning pale. "Come with me, my masters, come."

Benvenuto, persuaded by the arguments we have heard to make his peace with the all-powerful favorite, on the day following his conversation with Primaticcio took the little golden vase as a peace-offering, and repaired to the Hôtel d'Etampes, with Ascanio leaning on his arm, still very weak and very pale after a night of suffering. In the first place, the footmen refused to announce him at so early an hour, and he lost a good half-hour parleying with them. He had already begun to lose his temper, when Isabeau at last made her appearance, and consented to announce him to her mistress. She returned to say to Benvenuto that the duchess was dressing, and he must wait a short time. He took patience, therefore, and sat himself down upon a stool beside Ascanio, who was considerably overdone by the walk, in conjunction with his fever and his painful thoughts.

An hour passed. Benvenuto began to count the minutes. "After all," he thought, "the toilette of a duchess is the most important function of the day, and I don't propose to lose the benefit of the step I have taken for a quarter of an hour more or less."

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Nevertheless, in the face of this philosophical reflection, he began to count the seconds.

Meanwhile Ascanio turned paler and paler; he was determined to say nothing to his master of his sufferings, and had accompanied him without a word; but he had eaten nothing that morning, and, although he refused to acknowledge it, he felt that his strength was failing him.

Benvenuto could not remain seated, but began to stalk up and down the room.

A quarter of an hour passed.

"Are you suffering, my child?" he asked.

"No, master, indeed I 'm not: you are the one who is suffering. Be patient, I beg you, for she cannot be long now."

At that moment Isabeau appeared again.

"Your mistress is very slow," said Benvenuto.

The mischievous girl went to the window, and looked at the clock in the courtyard.

"Why, you have waited only an hour and a half," she said; "why do you complain, pray?"

As Cellini frowned, she laughed in his face, and tripped away.

Benvenuto, by a violent effort, subdued his wrath once more. But in order to do it he was obliged to resume his seat, and sat with folded arms, silent and stern. He seemed calm; but his wrath was fermenting silently. Two servants stood like statues at the door, observing him with a serious expression, which seemed to him derisory.

The clock struck the quarter. Benvenuto glanced at Ascanio, and saw that he was paler than ever, and almost ready to faint.

"Ah ça!" he cried, throwing his self-restraint to the

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winds, "so this is done designedly! I chose to believe what I was told, and wait good-naturedly: but if an insult is intended — and I am so little wonted to them, that the thought did not occur to me — if an insult is intended, I am not the man to allow myself to be insulted, even by a woman, and I go. Come, Ascanio."

As he spoke, Benvenuto, raising in his powerful hand the unhospitable stool, on which the duchess in her wrath had humiliated him for two mortal hours without his knowledge, let it fall to the floor and shattered it. The valets made a movement toward him, but he half drew his dagger and they stopped. Ascanio, terrified for his master, essayed to rise, but his excitement had exhausted what remained of his strength, and he fell to the floor unconscious. Benvenuto at first did not see him.

At that moment the duchess appeared in the doorway, pale and trembling with wrath.

"Yes, I go," Benvenuto repeated in a voice of thunder, perfectly well aware of her presence, but addressing the valets: "do you tell the woman that I take my present with me to give to somebody, I know not whom, who 'll be more worthy of it than herself. Tell her that, if she took me for one of her valets, like yourselves, she made a sad mistake, and that we artists do not sell our loyalty and homage as she sells her love! And now make way for me! Follow me, Ascanio!"

As he spoke, he turned toward his beloved pupil, and saw that his eyes were closed, and that his head had fallen back against the wall.

"Ascanio!" he cried, "Ascanio, my child, fainting, perhaps dying! O Ascanio, my beloved! and 't is this woman again — " And Benvenuto turned with a threatening gesture to Madame d'Etampes, at the same time starting to carry Ascanio away in his arms.

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The duchess meanwhile, transfixed with rage and terror, had not moved or spoken. But when she saw Ascanio with his head thrown back, and his long hair dishevelled, as white as marble, and so beautiful in his pallor, she rushed to him in obedience to an irresistible impulse, and fell on her knees opposite Benvenuto, seizing one of Ascanio's hands in her own.

"Why, the child is dying! If you take him away, monsieur, you will kill him. He may need immediate attention. Jerome, run and fetch Master André. I do not mean that he shall go from here in this condition, do you understand? You may go or stay, as you please, but leave him."

Benvenuto cast a penetrating glance at the duchess, and one of deep anxiety at Ascanio. He realized that there could be no danger in leaving his cherished pupil in the care of Madame d'Etampes, while there might be very serious danger in removing him without proper precaution. His mind was soon made up, as always, for swift and inexorable decision was one of Cellini's most striking good or bad qualities.

"You will answer for him, madame?" he said.

"Oh, with my life!" cried the duchess.

He softly kissed his apprentice on the forehead, and, wrapping his cloak about him, stalked proudly from the room, with his hand upon his dagger, not without exchanging a glance of hatred and disdain with the duchess. As for the two men, he did not deign to look at them.

Anne followed her enemy so long as she could see him with eyes blazing with wrath; then, with an entire change of expression, her eyes rested sadly and anxiously upon the comely invalid; love took the place of anger, the tigress became a gazelle once more.

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"Master André," she said to her physician, who entered hurriedly, "save him; he is wounded and dying."

"It is nothing," said Master André, "a mere passing weakness."

He poured upon Ascanio's lips a few drops of a cordial which he always carried about him.

"He is coming to himself," cried the duchess, "he moved. Now, master, he must be kept quiet, must he not? Take him into yonder room," she said to the valets, "and lay him upon a couch.— But, hark ye," she added, lowering her voice, so that none but they could hear: "if one word escapes you as to what you have seen and heard, your neck shall pay for your tongue. Go."

The trembling lackeys bowed, and, gently lifting Ascanio, bore him away.

Remaining alone with the provost and the Viscomte de Marmagne, prudent and passive spectators of the outrage upon her, Madame d'Etampes eyed them both, especially the latter, with a scornful glance, but she speedily repressed the inclination to express her contempt in words.

"I was saying, viscount," she began in a bitter tone, but calmly, "I was saying that the thing you proposed was very serious; but I did not reflect sufficiently upon it. I have sufficient power, I think, to permit me to strike down a traitor, even as I should have sufficient, if need were, to deal with indiscreet friends. The king would condescend to punish him this time, I trust; but I choose to avenge myself. Punishment would make the insult public; vengeance will bury it. You have been cool and clever enough, messieurs, to postpone my vengeance, in order not to compromise its success, and I

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congratulate you upon it. Be shrewd enough now, I conjure you, not to let it escape you, and do not compel me to have recourse to others than yourselves. Viscomte de Marmagne, it is necessary to speak plainly to you. I guarantee you equal impunity with the executioner; but if you care for my advice, I advise you and your sbirri to lay aside the sword, and trust to the dagger. Say nothing, but act, and that promptly; that is the most satisfactory response. Adieu, messieurs."

With these words, uttered in a short, abrupt tone, the duchess extended her hand as if to point out the door to the two noblemen. They bowed awkwardly, too confused to find words in which to frame an excuse, and left the room.

"Oh, to think that I am only a woman, and am obliged to resort to such dastards!" exclaimed Anne, looking after them while her lips curled disdainfully. "Oh how I despise them all, royal lover, venal husband, valet in silken doublet, valet in livery, — all save a single one whom in my own despite I admire, and another whom I delight to love!"

She entered the room to which the interesting invalid had been carried. As she approached the couch Ascanio opened his eyes.

"It was nothing," said Master André to the duchess. "The young man has received a wound in the shoulder, and fatigue, some mental shock, or hunger, it may be, caused a momentary faintness, from which he has completely recovered, as you see, by the use of cordials. He is fully restored now, and may safely be taken home in a litter."

"Very good," said the duchess, handing a purse to Master André, who bowed low and went out.

"Where am I?" said Ascanio, seeking to collect his thoughts.

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"You are with me, at my home, Ascanio," the duchess replied.

"At your home, madame? Ah! yes, I recognize you; you are Madame d'Etampes. And I remember too — Where is Benvenuto? Where is my master?"

"Do not stir, Ascanio; your master is safe, never fear. He is dining peaceably at home at the present moment."

"But how does it happen that he left me here?"

"You lost consciousness, and he trusted you to my care."

"And you assure me, madame, that he is in no danger; that he went from here unharmed?"

"I tell you again, I promise you, Ascanio, that he has never been less exposed to danger than at this moment. Ungrateful boy, when I, Duchesse d'Etampes, am watching over him and caring for him with the tender solicitude of a sister, to persist in speaking of his master!"

"O madame, I pray you pardon me, and accept my thanks!" said Ascanio.

"Indeed, it's high time!" rejoined the duchess, shaking her pretty head with a sly smile.

Thereupon she began to speak, giving to every word a tender intonation, and to the simplest phrases the subtlest of meanings, asking every question greedily and at the same time with respect, and listening to every reply as if her destiny depended upon it. She was humble, soft and caressing as a cat, quick to grasp every cue, like a consummate actress, leading Ascanio gently back to the subject if he wandered from it, and giving him all the credit for ideas which she evolved and cunningly led up to; seeming to distrust herself, and listening to him as if he were an oracle; exerting to the utmost the cultivated, charming intellect which, as we have said, caused

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her to be called the loveliest of blue-stockings and the most learned of beauties. In short, this interview became in her hands the most cajoling flattery, and the cleverest of seductions. As the youth for the third or fourth time made ready to take his leave, she said, still detaining him: —

"You speak, Ascanio, with so much eloquence and fire of your goldsmith's art, that it is a perfect revelation to me, and henceforth I shall see the conception of a master where I have hitherto seen only an ornament. In your opinion Benvenuto is the great master of the art?"

"Madame, he has surpassed the divine Michel-Angelo himself."

"I am pleased to hear it. You lessen the ill-will I bear him on account of his rude behavior to me.

"Oh! you must not mind his roughness, madame. His brusque manner conceals a most ardent and devoted heart; but Benvenuto is at the same time the most impatient and fiery of men. He thought that you were making him wait in mere sport, and the insult — "

"Say the mischief," rejoined the duchess with the simulated confusion of a spoiled child. "It is the truth that I was not dressed when your master arrived, and I simply prolonged my toilet a little. It was wrong, very wrong. You see that I confess my sins to you freely. I knew not that you were with him," she added eagerly.

"True, madame, but Cellini, who is not very sagacious, I admit, and whose confidence has been sadly abused, deems you to be — I may say it to you who are so gracious and kind — very wicked and very terrible, and he thought that he detected an insult in what was nothing more than child's play."

"Do you think so?" queried the duchess, unable wholly to repress a mocking smile.

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"Oh, forgive him, madame! he is noble-hearted and generous, and if he knew you as you are, believe me, he would ask your pardon for his error on his knees."

"Say no more, I pray you! Do you think to make me love him now? I bear him a grudge, I tell you, and, to begin with, I propose to raise up a rival."

"That will be difficult, madame."

"No, Ascanio, for you, his pupil, shall be the rival. Allow me, at least, if I must do homage to this great genius who detests me, to do it indirectly. Say, will you, of whose charming inventive talent Cellini himself boasts, refuse to place your talent at my service? And since you do not share your master's prejudices against my person, will you not prove it to me by consenting to assist in embellishing it?"

"Madame, all that I am and all the power I have is at your service. You are so kind to me, you have inquired with so much interest concerning my past and my hopes for the future, that I am henceforth devoted to you heart and soul."

"Child, I have done nothing yet, and I ask nothing from you at present except a little of your talent. Tell me, have you not seen some jewel of surpassing beauty in your dreams? I have superb pearls; into what marvellous creation would you like to transform them, my pretty wizard? Shall I confide to you an idea of my own? A moment since, as you lay in yonder room with pale cheeks and head thrown back, I fancied that I saw a beautiful lily whose stalk was bending in the wind. Make me a lily of pearls and silver to wear in my corsage," said the enchantress, placing her hand upon her heart.

"Ah! madame, such kindness —"

"Ascanio, do you care to repay my kindness, as you

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call it? Promise me that you will take me for your confidante, your friend, that you will hide nothing from me of your acts, your plans, your sorrows, for I see that you are unhappy. Promise to come to me when you stand in need of help or counsel."

"Why, madame, you bestow one favor more upon me, rather than ask a proof of my gratitude."

"However that may be, you promise?"

"Alas! I would have given you the promise yesterday, madame; for yesterday I might have thought that I might some day need your help or counsel; but to-day it is in no one's power to help me."

"Who knows?"

"I know, madame."

"Ah me! Ascanio, you are unhappy, you are unhappy, you cannot deceive me."

Ascanio sadly shook his head.

"You are disingenuous with a friend, Ascanio; 't is not well done of you," the duchess continued, taking the young man's hand, and softly pressing it.

"My master must be anxious, madame, and I am afraid that my presence discommodes you. I feel quite well again. Allow me to withdraw."

"How eager you are to leave me! Wait at least until a litter is prepared for you. Do not resist; it is the doctor's order, and my own."

Anne called a servant, and gave him the necessary orders, then bade Isabeau bring her pearls and some of her jewels, which she handed to Ascanio.

"Now I restore your freedom," she said; "but when you are fully restored to health, my lily will be the first thing you give your mind to, will it not? Meanwhile, think upon it, I beg you, and as soon as you have finished your design come and show it to me."

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"Yes, Madame la Duchesse."

"And do you not wish me to think upon how I can be of service to you, and to do whatever you wish, since you are doing for me what I wish? Come, Ascanio, come, my child, and tell me what you sigh for? For at your age one seeks in vain to still the beating of his heart, turn his eyes away, and close his lips, — one always sighs for something. Do you deem me to be so devoid of power and influence that you disdain to make me your confidante?"

"I know, madame," rejoined Ascanio, "that you enjoy all the power which you deserve. But no human power will avail to help me in my present plight."

"Tell me all the same," said the duchess; "I insist!" Then, with fascinating coquetry, softening her voice and her expression, she added, "I beseech you!"

"Alas! alas! madame," cried Ascanio, as his grief overflowed. "Alas! since you speak so kindly to me, and since my departure will cover my shame and tears, I will do, not as I should have done yesterday, address a prayer to the duchess, but make a confidante of the woman. Yesterday I would have said, 'I love Colombe, and I am happy!' To-day I will say, 'Colombe does not love me, and there is nothing left for me to do but to die!' Adieu, madame, and pity me!"

Ascanio hurriedly kissed Madame d'Etampes's hand, as she stood mute and motionless, and vanished.

"A rival! a rival!" said Anne, as if awaking from a dream; "but she does not love him, and he shall love me, for I will have it so! Oh yes! I swear that he shall love me, and that I will kill Benvenuto!"

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XIV.

WHEREIN IT IS PROVEN THAT SORROW IS THE GROUNDWORK OF THE LIFE OF MAN.

We ask pardon for the bitter misanthropy of this title. It is the fact that the present chapter will exhibit scarcely any other coherent principle than sorrow, and therein will resemble life. The reflection is not new, as a celebrated character in comic opera would say, but it is consoling, in that it will perhaps be accepted as an apology by the reader, whom we are about to lead, even as Virgil led Dante, from despair to despair.

No offence is intended either to the reader or to Virgil.

Our friends, in very truth, at the moment at which we have now arrived, were all, beginning with Benvenuto and ending with Jacques Aubry, plunged in melancholy, and we are about to see them gradually engulfed in the dark rising tide of sorrow.

We left Benvenuto exceedingly anxious concerning Ascanio's condition. On his return to the Grand-Nesle, he thought but little of the wrath of Madame d'Etampes, I promise you. His sole preoccupation was his dear invalid. So it was that his joy knew no bounds when the door opened to give admission to a litter, and Ascanio, leaping lightly to the ground, grasped his hand, and assured him that he was no worse than in the morning. But Benvenuto's brow quickly grew dark at the apprentice's first words, and he listened with an expression of peculiar dissatisfaction while the younger man said: —

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"Master, I propose to show you that you have done a wrong for which you must make amends, and I am sure that you will thank me instead of bearing me ill-will for it. You are mistaken with relation to Madame d'Etampes; she neither despises nor hates you; on the contrary, she honors and admires you, and you must agree that you were very rude in your treatment of her, — a woman and a duchess. Master, Madame d'Etampes is not only as beautiful as a goddess, she is as kind as an angel, modest and enthusiastic, simple-minded and noble, and at heart her disposition is lovely. What you deemed insulting insolence this morning was nothing more than childish mischief. I implore you, for your own sake — you surely would not be unjust — as well as for mine, whom she made welcome and cared for with such touching kindness, not to persist in your insulting contempt for her. I will answer for it that you will have no difficulty in persuading her — But you do not answer me, dear master. You shake your head. Can it be that I have wounded you?"

"Hark ye, my child," rejoined Benvenuto gravely. "I have often told you that in my view there is but one thing in the world forever beautiful, forever young, forever fruitful, and that is art divine. And yet, I think, I hope, I know, that in certain tender hearts love also counts for much, — a deep and noble sentiment, which may make happy a whole life; but it is very rare. For what is love in most cases? A fancy of a day, a joyous intimacy, in which both parties are deceived, and very often in the best of faith. I make sport of this love, as it is called, Ascanio, with great freedom as you know; I laugh at its high-flown pretensions and its stilted language. I do not slander it. To say truth, it rather pleases me; it has *in petto* all the joy, all

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the sweetness, all the jealousy of a serious passion, but its wounds are not mortal. Comedy or tragedy, after a certain time one hardly remembers it save as a sort of theatrical performance. And then, Ascanio, while women are charming creatures, to my mind all save a very few do not deserve and do not understand anything more than this passing fancy. To give them more, one must be a dupe or an imprudent fool. Take Scozzone, for example: if she should enter my heart, she would be terrified at what she saw therein; I leave her at the threshold, and she sings and dances, she is light of heart and happy. Moreover, Ascanio, these ever changing alliances have a less durable basis, which however is all-sufficient for the artist, — the worship of form, and the adoration of pure beauty. That is their serious side, and it is on account of that that I say no ill of them, although I laugh at them. But, Ascanio, mark this: there are other passions which do not make me laugh, but make me tremble, — terrible, insensate passions, as impossible as things we see in dreams."

"Mon Dieu!" thought Ascanio, "can he have learned aught of my mad passion for Colombe?"

"They afford neither pleasure nor happiness," continued Cellini, "and yet they take possession of one's whole being; they are vampires which slowly drink your whole existence, which devour your heart little by little; they hold you in a deathly embrace, and you cannot extricate yourself. Ascanio, Ascanio, beware of such a passion. 'T is clear that they are mere chimeras, and that they can in no way profit one, and yet men who know this well plunge into them body and soul, and abandon their lives to them almost with joy."

"He has that in his mind! he knows all!" said Ascanio to himself.

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"My dear son," pursued Benvenuto, "if there still is time, break these bonds which would hold you fast forever; you will bear the mark of them, but try at least to save your life."

"Who told you that I love her, in God's name?" demanded the apprentice.

"If you do not love her, God be praised!" exclaimed Benvenuto, thinking that Ascanio denied the impeachment, when he simply asked a question. "Beware at all events, for I saw this morning that she loves you."

"This morning! Of whom are you speaking? What do you mean?"

"Of whom am I speaking? of Madame d'Etampes."

"Madame d'Etampes!" echoed the bewildered apprentice. "Why, master you are wrong, it 's not possible. You say that you saw that Madame d'Etampes loves me?"

"Ascanio, I am forty years old; I have lived, and I know whereof I speak. By her manner of looking at you, by the favorable opinion which she has succeeded in leading you to form of her, I would dare swear that she loves you; and from the enthusiasm with which you defended her just now I was much afraid that you had fallen in love with her as well. In that case, dear Ascanio, you would be lost: her love, hot enough to consume your whole being, when it left you, would leave you with no illusion, no faith, no hope, and you would have no other resource but to love others as you had been loved yourself, and to carry to other hearts the havoc that had been wrought in your own."

"Master," said Ascanio, "I do not know whether Madame d'Etampes loves me, but I am perfectly sure that I do not love Madame d'Etampes."

Benvenuto was no more than half convinced by As-

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out. But you can lead him like a child by pretending to obey him, and it's very pleasant to hear him talk. You should hear him say to me, 'Dame Ruperta,' (he calls me Ruperta in his strange pronunciation, although my real name is Ruperte, at your service,) 'Dame Ruperta, this is an excellent leg of mutton, and done to a turn; Dame Ruperta, your beans are seasoned most triumphantly; Dame Ruperta, I look upon you as the queen of governesses,' — and all this so winningly that it touches one to the heart."

"*A la bonne heure!* But he kills people, they say."

"Oh yes! when he's crossed, he kills very handily. It's a custom of his country; but it's only when he's attacked, and then only in self-defence. Otherwise he is very light-hearted and prepossessing."

"I haven't seen him myself. He has red hair, hasn't he?"

"No indeed! His hair is as black as yours and mine, — as mine was, that is. Ah! you have never seen him? Well, just come in casually some time to borrow something, and I'll show him to you. He's a handsome man, and would make a superb archer."

"Apropos of handsome men, how is our comely youth to-day? The wounded man, I mean, the attractive young apprentice who received such a terrible wound in saving the provost's life."

"Ascanio? Pray do you know him?"

"Do I know him! He promised my young mistress Colombe and myself to show us his jewels. Remind him of it, if you please, my dear madame. But all this doesn't answer my question, and Colombe will be very glad to know that her father's savior is out of danger."

"Oh! you can tell her that he is doing very well. He got up just now. But the surgeon has forbidden his

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leaving his room, although I think a breath of fresh air would do him a world of good. It 's out of the question, though, in this burning sun. Your Grand-Nesle garden is a veritable desert. Not a shaded spot anywhere; no vegetation but nettles and briers, and four or five leafless trees. It 's enormous, but very unpleasant to walk in. Our master consoles himself with tennis, but poor Ascanio is n't well enough yet to hold a racket, and must be bored to death. He 's so active, the dear boy, — I speak of him in that way because he 's my favorite, and is always courteous to his elders. He 's not like that bear of a Pagolo, or Catherine the giddy-pate."

"And you say that the poor fellow — "

"Must be eating his heart out with having to pass whole days on a couch in his bedroom."

"Mon Dieu! " exclaimed kind-hearted Dame Perrine, "pray tell the poor boy to come over to the Petit-Nesle, where there is such beautiful shade. I will gladly admit him, although Messire le Prévôt has expressly forbidden it. Why, it would be most virtuous in me to disobey him, in order to benefit the man who saved his life. And you talk of ennui! We are the ones who are drying up with it. The comely apprentice will divert us; he will tell us tales of his Italy, and show us his necklaces and bracelets, and chatter with Colombe. Young folks like to be together and prattle, and they languish in solitude. So it 's agreed, is n't it? Just tell your Benjamin that he 's at liberty to come and walk in our garden whenever he pleases, provided he comes alone, or with you, Dame Ruperte, to give him your arm. Knock four times, the first three gently and the last louder: I shall know what it means, and I will come and open the door."

"Thanks for Ascanio and myself; I will not fail to

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tell him of your amiable offer, and he will not fail to avail himself of it."

"I am delighted to think so, Dame Ruperte."

"*Au revoir*, Dame Perrine! Charmed to have made the acquaintance of such an estimable person."

"The same to you, Dame Ruperte."

The two gossips bowed low to each other, and parted with mutual satisfaction.

The gardens of the Séjour de Nesle were in truth, as Ruperta said, dry and scorched on one side of the wall, cool and shady as a forest on the other. The provost's miserly instinct led him to leave the garden of the Grand-Nesle uncared for, as the cost of keeping it in condition would have been considerable, and he was not sufficiently sure of his title to renew, perhaps for the benefit of his successor, the trees which he had lost no time in cutting down as soon as he took possession. His daughter's presence at the Petit-Nesle accounted for his leaving the shady thickets there untouched, as the poor child had no other recreation than to sit beneath them. Raimbault and his two assistants sufficed to keep Colombe's garden in order, and even to embellish it somewhat.

It was laid out and planted in extremely good taste. At the back was the kitchen garden, Dame Perrine's kingdom; along the wall dividing it from the Grand-Nesle Colombe had her flower garden, called by Dame Perrine the Morning Avenue, because the sun's early rays fell full upon it, and sunrise was the time ordinarily selected by Colombe to water her marguerites and roses. Let us note, in passing, that from the room over the foundry in the Grand-Nesle one could see every movement of the lovely gardener without being seen. Following out Dame Perrine's geographical nomenclature, there was the Noonday Avenue, terminated by a thicket

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where Colombe loved to sit, and read or embroider, during the heat of the day. At the other end of the garden was the Evening Avenue, planted with a triple row of lindens, which made it delightfully cool and fresh: it was here that Colombe was accustomed to walk after supper.

This last named avenue Dame Perrine had in mind as a spot well adapted to hasten the convalescence of the wounded Ascanio. She was very careful, however, to say nothing to Colombe of her charitable intentions. It was possible that she would be too obedient to her father's commands, and would refuse to concur in her governess's open defiance of them. And in that case what would Dame Ruperta think of her neighbor's authority and influence? No; since she had gone so far, perhaps a little recklessly, she must go on to the end. Indeed, the good woman's offence was excusable when we reflect that she had no one but Colombe to whom she could speak from morning till night, and more often than not Colombe was so deeply absorbed in her own thoughts that she did not reply.

The reader will readily understand Ascanio's ecstasy when he learned that paradise was open to him, and how fervently he blessed Ruperta. He insisted upon availing himself of his good fortune on the instant, and Ruperta had all the difficulty in the world in persuading him that he ought at least to wait until evening. He had every reason to believe that Dame Perrine's suggestion was made with Colombe's sanction, and that thought made him mad with joy. With how great impatience, therefore, mingled with vague alarm, did he count the dragging hours! At last, at last, the clock struck five. The apprentices left the studio. Benvenuto had been away since noon, and was believed to have gone to the Louvre.

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Thereupon Ruperta said solemnly to the apprentice, who gazed at her as she had not been gazed at for many a year: —

"Now that the time has come, follow me, young man."

They crossed the courtyard together, and she knocked four times at the door leading into the precincts of the Petit-Nesle.

"Say nothing of this to the master, good Ruperta," said Ascanio, who knew that Cellini was a good deal of a scoffer and sceptic in the matter of love, and did not choose to have his pure flame profaned by his witticisms.

Ruperta was on the point of making inquiries as to the reason for this injunction, which it would be hard for her to obey, when the door opened and Dame Perrine appeared.

"Come in, my fine fellow," she said. "How are you to-day? Pallor becomes you, do you know: it 's a pleasure to look at you. Come in also, Dame Ruperta: take the path to the left, young man, Colombe is just coming down to the garden; it 's the time when she always walks. Do you try and persuade her not to scold me too severely for admitting you."

"What!" cried Ascanio, — "Mademoiselle Colombe does n't know — "

"No indeed! Do you think she would have consented to disobey her father? I have brought her up on correct principles. I disobeyed for both, myself. Faith! I don't care! we can't always live like hermits. Raimbault won't see anything, or, if he does, I have a way to make him hold his tongue; if worse comes to worst, it won't be the first time I have held my own against Monsieur le Prévôt!"

Dame Perrine was very loquacious concerning her master, but Ruperta alone followed her in what she

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said. Ascanio was standing still, listening to nothing save the beating of his heart. He did, however, hear these words, let fall by Dame Perrine as they moved away: —

"This is the path where Colombe walks every evening, and she will soon be here without doubt. You see that the sun won't reach you here, my gallant invalid."

Ascanio expressed his thanks with a gesture, and walked forward a few steps, once more immersed in his reverie, and anticipating what was to come with mingled anxiety and impatience. He heard Dame Perrine say to Ruperta as they walked along, —

"This is Colombe's favorite bench."

And upon that he left the two gossips to continue their walk and their conversation, and sat softly down without a word upon the sacred seat.

What was his purpose? whither was he going? He had no idea. He sought Colombe because she was young and fair, and he was young and fair. No ambitious thought had ever entered his head in connection with her. To be near her was his only desire: for the rest he put his trust in God, or, rather, he did not look so far into the future. There is no to-morrow in love.

Colombe, for her part, had thought more than once, and in spite of herself, of the young stranger who had appeared to her in her loneliness as Gabriel appeared to Mary. To see him once more had been from the first the secret desire of this child, who had hitherto had no desire. But, being abandoned by an inconsiderate father to the guardianship of her own virtue, she was too high-minded not to deal with herself with the severity which noble souls never think themselves free to dispense with unless their will is fettered. She therefore bravely put aside her thoughts of Ascanio, and yet those thoughts

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persisted in forcing a way through the triple ramparts Colombe had built around her heart, more easily than Ascanio made his way through the wall of the Grand-Nesle. So it was that Colombe had passed the three or four days since the engagement, alternating between the fear of not seeing Ascanio again, and alarm at the thought of being in his presence. Her only consolation was to dream of him as she sat at her work or walked in the garden. During the day she shut herself up in her own room, to the despair of Dame Perrine, who was thereby doomed to carry on a perpetual monologue in the abyss of her own thoughts. As soon as the intense heat of the day had gone by, she would go down to the cool, shady path, poetically christened by Dame Perrine the Evening Avenue, and there, sitting on the bench where Ascanio now sat, she would allow the sun to set and the stars to rise, listening and replying to her thoughts, until Dame Perrine came to tell her that it was time to retire.

At the usual hour, then, the young man saw Colombe suddenly appear, book in hand, at the end of the path where he was sitting. She was reading the "Lives of the Saints," a dangerous romance of faith and love, well adapted, perhaps, to prepare one for the cruel sufferings of life, but not, surely, for the cold realities of the world. Colombe did not see Ascanio at first, but started back in surprise when she saw a strange woman with Dame Perrine. At that decisive moment, Dame Perrine, like a determined general, plunged boldly to the heart of the question.

"Dear Colombe," she said, "I know your kind heart so well that I did n't think I needed your express sanction to allow a poor wounded youth, who received his wound in your father's cause, to come and take the air under these trees. You know there is no shade at the Grand-

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Nesle, and the surgeon won't answer for his life unless he can walk an hour every day."

While she was uttering this well intentioned but barefaced falsehood, Colombe suddenly spied Ascanio, and a vivid flush suffused her cheeks. The apprentice, meanwhile, in the presence of Colombe, could hardly summon strength to rise to his feet.

"It was n't my sanction that was necessary, Dame Perrine," said the maiden at last, "but my father's."

As she said these words, sadly but firmly, Colombe reached the stone bench upon which Ascanio had been sitting.

He overheard her, and said, with clasped hands:—

"Forgive me, Madame. I thought—I hoped that your kindness had ratified Dame Perrine's courteous offer; but if it is not so," he continued, in a tone of great gentleness, not unmixed with pride, "I beg you to excuse my involuntary boldness, and I will withdraw at once."

"But it is not for me to decide," replied Colombe hastily, deeply moved. "I am not mistress here. Remain to-day at all events, even if my father's prohibition was meant to extend to him who saved his life: remain, Monsieur, if for nothing else than to receive my thanks."

"O Madame!" murmured Ascanio, "it is for me to thank you, and I do so from the bottom of my heart. But by remaining shall I not interfere with your walk? The place I have taken, too, is ill chosen."

"Not at all," rejoined Colombe mechanically, without apparently paying attention, so embarrassed was she, to the other end of the stone bench.

At that moment Dame Perrine, who had not stirred since Colombe's mortifying reprimand, growing weary of her own immobility and her young mistress's silence, took Dame Ruperta's arm and walked softly away.

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The young people were left alone.

Colombe, whose eyes were fixed upon her book, did not at first observe the departure of her governess, and yet she was not reading, for there was a mist before her eyes. She was still excited and dizzy. All that she was capable of doing, and that she did instinctively, was to conceal her agitation, and repress the violent beating of her heart. Ascanio, too, was beside himself; he was excessively pained when he thought that Colombe desired to send him away, and insanely happy when he fancied that he could detect signs of emotion in his inamorata; and these sudden alternations of emotion in his enfeebled state transported and unnerved him at the same time. He was like one in a swoon, and yet his thoughts followed upon one another's heels with astounding rapidity and force. "She despises me! she loves me!" he said to himself almost in the same breath. He glanced at Colombe, silent and still, and the tears rolled down his cheeks, although he felt them not. Meanwhile a bird was singing in the branches overhead; the leaves were scarcely stirring in the gentle breeze. From the Augustine church the evening Angelus came floating softly downward through the air. Never was July evening more calm and peaceful. It was one of Nature's solemn moments, when the soul enters a new sphere,— one of those moments which seem twenty years, and which one remembers all his life.

The two lovely children, so well suited to each other, had but to move their hands to join them, and yet it seemed as if there were a yawning gulf between them.

After a moment or two Colombe raised her head: —

"You are weeping!" she cried, obeying an impulse stronger than her will.

"I am not weeping," said Ascanio, falling back upon

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the bench; but his hands were wet with tears when he took them from his face.

"It is true," he said, "I am weeping."

"Why, what is the matter? I will call some one. Are you in pain?"

"Only from my thoughts."

"What thoughts, pray?"

"I was thinking that perhaps it would have been better for me to die the other day."

"Die! How old are you, pray, that you should talk thus of dying?"

"Nineteen: but the age of unhappiness is a fit age for death."

"And what of your kindred, who would weep for you?" said Colombe, unconsciously eager for a glimpse into the past of this life, of which she had a confused feeling that the future would be involved with her own.

"I have no father or mother, and there is no one to weep for me save my master, Benvenuto."

"Poor orphan!"

"Yes, an orphan indeed! My father never loved me, and I lost my mother at ten years, just when I was beginning to understand her love and return it. My father — But what am I saying, and what are my father and my mother to you?"

"Oh, yes! Go on, Ascanio."

"Saints in heaven! you remember my name!"

"Go on, go on," whispered Colombe, putting her hands before her face to hide her blushes.

"My father was a goldsmith, and my dear mother was herself the daughter of a Florentine goldsmith, named Raphael del Moro, of a noble Italian family; for in our Italian republics, to work implies no dishonor, and you will see more than one ancient and illustrious name on

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the sign of a shop. My master, Cellini, for example, is as noble as the King of France, if not even more so. Raphael del Moro, who was poor, compelled his daughter Stefana to marry, against her will, a fellow goldsmith almost of his own age, but very wealthy. Alas! my mother and Benvenuto Cellini loved each other, but were both fortuneless. Benvenuto was travelling everywhere to make a name for himself and earn money. He was far away, and could not interfere to prevent the marriage. Gismondo Gaddi (that was my father's name) soon began to detest his wife because she did not love him, although he never knew that she loved somebody else. My father was a man of a violent and jealous disposition. May he forgive me if I accuse him wrongfully, but children have a relentless memory for their wrongs. Very often my mother sought shelter by my cradle from his brutal treatment, but he did not always respect that sanctuary. Sometimes he struck her, may God forgive him! while she held me in her arms: and at every blow my mother would give me a kiss to help deaden the pain. Ah! I remember well both the blows my mother received and the kisses she gave me.

"The Lord, who is just, dealt a blow at my father where he would feel it most keenly, — in his wealth, which was dearer to him than anything else in the world. Disaster after disaster overwhelmed him. He died of grief because his money was all gone, and my mother died a few days after, because she thought that she was no longer beloved.

"I was left alone in the world. My father's creditors laid hands upon all that he left, and, in all their ferreting to make sure that they had forgotten nothing, they failed to discover a little weeping child. An old maid-servant who was fond of me kept me two days from

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charity, but she was living on charity herself, and had none too much bread for her own needs.

"She was uncertain what to do with me, when a man covered with dust entered the room, took me in his arms, embraced me, weeping, and, having given the good old woman some money, took me away with him. It was Benvenuto Cellini, who had come from Rome to Florence expressly to find me. He cherished me, instructed me in his art, and kept me always with him, and, as I say he is the only one who would weep for my death."

Colombe listened with lowered eyes and oppressed heart to the orphan's story, which in the matter of loneliness was her own, and to the story of the poor mother's life, which would perhaps be hers some day; for she too was doomed to marry against her will a man who would hate her because she would not love him.

"You are unjust to God," she said to Ascanio; "there is some one, your kind master at least, who loves you, and you knew your mother. I cannot remember my mother's kisses, for she died in giving birth to me. I was brought up by my father's sister, a crabbed, ill-tempered woman, and yet I mourned her bitterly when I lost her two years ago, for in the absence of any other affection my heart clung to her as ivy clings to a cliff. For two years I have been living in this place with Dame Perrine, and notwithstanding my loneliness, and although my father comes very rarely to see me, these two years have been and will be the happiest of my whole life."

"You have indeed suffered much," said Ascanio, "but though the past has been so painful, why do you dread the future? Yours, alas! is full of glorious promise. You are nobly born, rich, and beautiful, and the shadow of your early years will only bring out in bolder relief the splendor of the rest of your life."

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Colombe sadly shook her head.

"Oh mother! mother!" she murmured.

When, rising in thought above the paltry present, one loses sight of the trivial necessities of the moment in the brilliant flashes which illuminate and epitomize a whole life, past and future, the heart is sometimes affected with a dangerous vertigo; and when one's memory is laden with a thousand sorrows, when one dreads bitter anguish to come, the same heart is often a prey to terrible emotion and fatal weakness. One must be very strong not to fall when the weight of destiny is pressing down upon one's heart. These two children, who had already suffered so much, who had been always alone, had but to pronounce a single word to make a single future for their twofold past; but one was too dutiful, the other too respectful, to pronounce that word.

Ascanio gazed at Colombe, however, with infinite tenderness in his eyes, and Colombe permitted his scrutiny with divine trust. With clasped hands, and in the tone in which he might have prayed, the apprentice said to the maiden:—

"Colombe, if you have any desire which I can gratify by pouring out all my blood to gratify it, if any disaster threatens you, and nothing more than a life is needed to avert it, say one word to me, Colombe, as you might say it to your brother, and I shall be very happy."

"Thanks, thanks!" said Colombe; "I know that you have already nobly risked your life once at a word from me; but God alone can save me this time."

She had no time to say more, for Dame Perrine and Dame Ruperta stopped in front of them at that moment.

The gossips had made the most of their time, as well as the two lovers, and had formed a close alliance, based upon mutual sympathy. Dame Perrine had confided to

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Dame Ruperta an infallible cure for chilblains, and Dame Ruperta, not to be outdone, had imparted to Dame Perrine the secret of preserving plums. After such an exchange of confidence, it is easy to understand that they were thenceforth united for life and death, and they had agreed to meet frequently, whatever the cost.

"Well, Colombe," said Dame Perrine, as they drew nigh the bench, "do you still bear me a grudge? Tell me, would n't it have been a shame to refuse admission to him but for whom the house would have no master? Should n't we do our utmost to help cure this youth of a wound received for us? Look, Dame Ruperta, and see if he does n't already look better, and if he has n't more color than when he came."

"Yes indeed," assented Ruperta, "he never had more color when he was in the best of health."

"Consider, Colombe," continued Dame Perrine, "it would be downright murder to interrupt convalescence so happily begun. Come, the end justifies the means. You will allow me to admit him to-morrow at dusk, won't you? It will be a pleasant change for you as well, poor child, and a very innocent one, God knows, when Dame Ruperta and I are both here. Upon my word, Colombe, you need some sort of a change. And who is there to tell the provost that we have softened his stern orders a bit? And remember that, before he gave the order, you told Ascanio that he might come and show you his jewels; he forgot them to-day, so he must bring them to-morrow."

Colombe looked at Ascanio; the color had fled from his cheeks, and he was awaiting her reply in an agony of suspense.

In the eyes of a poor girl, kept a prisoner and tyrannized over, there was a world of flattery in this humility.

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There was then some one in the world whose happiness depended upon her, whom she could make glad or sad with a word! Every one exults in his own power. The insolent airs of Comte d'Orbec had humiliated Colombe very recently. The hapless prisoner — forgive her, pray! — could not resist the longing to see the joyful light shine in Ascanio's eyes, so she said, with a blush and a smile, —

"Dame Perrine, what is this you have persuaded me to do?"

Ascanio tried to speak, but could only clasp his hands effusively; his knees trembled under him.

"Thanks, fair lady!" said Ruperta, with a deep courtesy. "Come, Ascanio, you are still weak, and it is time to go in. Give me your arm, and let us go."

The apprentice could hardly muster strength to say "Adieu" and "Thanks!" but he supplemented his words with a look in which his heart spoke volumes, and meekly followed the servant, his whole being overflowing with joy.

Colombe fell back upon the bench, absorbed in thought, and conscious of a pleasurable excitement, for which she reproached herself, and which was entirely unfamiliar to her.

"Until to-morrow!" said Dame Perrine, triumphantly, as she took leave of her guests after escorting them to the door; "if you choose, young man, you can come in this way every day for three months."

"And why for three months only?" asked Ascanio, who had dreamed of coming always.

"*Dame!*" was Dame Perrine's reply, "because in three months Colombe is to marry Comte d'Orbec.

Ascanio needed all the strength of his will to keep from falling.

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"Colombe to marry Comte d'Orbec!" he muttered. "O mon Dieu! mon Dieu! so I deceived myself! Colombe does not love me!"

As Dame Perrine closed the door behind him at that moment, and Dame Ruperta was walking in front of him, neither of them overheard.

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XII.

THE KING'S QUEEN.

We have said that Benvenuto left the studio about noon without saying whither he was going. He went to the Louvre to return the visit François I. paid him at the Cardinal of Ferrara's hotel.

The king had kept his word. The name of Benvenuto Cellini was given to all the doorkeepers and ushers, and all the doors flew open before him, — all the doors save one, that leading to the council chamber. François was discussing affairs of state with the first men in his realm, and, although the king's orders were explicit, they dared not introduce Cellini in the midst of the momentous session then in progress without further instructions from his Majesty.

In truth, France was at this time in a critical situation. We have thus far said but little of affairs of state, feeling sure that our readers, especially those of the gentler sex, would prefer affairs of the heart to politics; but we have at last reached a point where we can no longer draw back, and where we must needs cast a glance, which we will make as brief as possible, at France and Spain, or rather at François I. and Charles V., for in the sixteenth century kings were nations.

At the period at which we have arrived, by virtue of one of the periodical movements of the political see-saw, of which both so often felt the effects, François's situation had recently improved, and Charles's grown worse

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in equal degree. In fact, things had changed materially since the Treaty of Cambrai, which was negotiated by two women, Margaret of Austria, aunt of Charles V., and the Duchesse d'Angoulême, mother of François I. This treaty, which was the complement of the treaty of Madrid, provided that the King of Spain should cede Burgundy to the King of France, and that the King of France should renounce his claim to the homage of Flanders and Artois. Furthermore, the two young princes, who served as hostages for their father, were to be sent back to him in exchange for the sum of two millions of golden crowns. Lastly, good Queen Eleanora, Charles V.'s sister, who was promised at first to the Constable (Bourbon) as a reward for his treachery, and was afterwards married to François as a pledge of peace, was to return to the court of France with the two children, to whom she had been as affectionate and devoted as any mother. These stipulations were carried out with equal good faith on both sides.

But it will readily be believed that François's renunciation of his claim to the Duchy of Milan, exacted from him during his captivity, was only momentary. He was no sooner a free man once more, no sooner restored to power and health, than he turned his eyes again toward Italy. It was with the object of procuring countenance of his claims at the Court of Rome that he had married his son Henri, become Dauphin by the death of his elder brother François, to Catherine de Medicis, niece of Pope Clement VII.

Unfortunately, just at the moment when all the preparations for the king's meditated invasion were completed, Clement VII. died, and was succeeded by Alexander Farnese, who ascended the throne of St. Peter under the name of Paul III.

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Now Paul III. was determined not to allow himself to be inveigled into supporting the party of the Emperor, or of the King of France, but to adhere strictly to the policy of holding an equal balance between them.

With his mind at ease in that direction, the Emperor laid aside all anxiety on the subject of the preparations of France, and busied himself fitting out an expedition against Tunis, which had been seized by the corsair Cher-Eddin, so famous under the name of Barbarossa, who, having driven out Muley Hassan, had taken possession of the country, and was laying Sicily waste.

The expedition was entirely successful, and Charles V., after destroying three or four ships, sailed into the Bay of Naples in triumph.

There he received tidings which tended to encourage him still more. Charles III., Duke of Savoy, although he was the maternal uncle of François I., had followed the counsel of his new wife, Beatrice, daughter of Emmanuel of Portugal, and had abandoned the party of the King of France; so that when François, by virtue of his former treaties with Charles III., called upon him to receive his troops, the Duke of Savoy answered by refusing to do so, and François was reduced to the unenviable necessity of forcing the passage of the Alps, which he had hoped to find open to him by favor of his ally and kinsman.

But Charles V. was awakened from his feeling of security by a veritable thunder-clap. The king marched an army into Savoy so promptly that the duke found his province actually under occupation by the French troops before he suspected that it was invaded. Biron, who was in command of the army, seized Chambéry, appeared upon the Alpine passes, and threatened Piedmont just as Francesco Sforza, terror-stricken doubtless by the news

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of Biron's success, died suddenly, leaving the Duchy of Milan without an heir, and thereby not only making its conquest an easy matter for François, but giving him a strong claim to it as well.

Biron marched down into Italy, and seized Turin. There he halted, pitched his camp on the banks of the Sesia, and awaited developments.

Charles V. meanwhile had left Naples for Rome. The victory he had won over the long-time enemies of Christ procured him the honor of a triumphal entry into the capital of Christendom. This entry intoxicated the Emperor to such a point, that, contrary to his custom, he went beyond all bounds, and in full consistory accused François I. of heresy, basing the accusation upon the protection he accorded the Protestants, and upon his alliance with the Turks. Having recapitulated all their former causes of disagreement, wherein, according to his view, François was always the first at fault, he swore to wage a war of extermination against his brother-in-law.

His disasters in the past had made François as prudent as he formerly was reckless. And so, as soon as he found himself threatened at one time by the forces of Spain and of the Empire, he left D'Annebaut to guard Turin, and called Biron back to France, with orders to devote himself entirely to protecting the frontiers.

Those who were familiar with the chivalrous and enterprising character of François were at a loss to understand this retrograde movement, and supposed from his taking one backward step that he considered himself whipped in advance. This belief still further exalted the pride of Charles V.; he took command of his army in person, and resolved upon invading France from the south.

The results of this attempted invasion are well known.

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Marseilles, which had held out against the Connétable de Bourbon and the Marquis of Pescara, the two greatest soldiers of the time, had no difficulty in holding out against Charles V., a great politician, but of only moderate capacity as a general. Charles was not discouraged, but left Marseilles behind, and attempted to march upon Avignon; but Montmorency had constructed an impregnable camp between the Durance and the Rhone, against which Charles expended his force to no purpose. So that, after six weeks of fruitless endeavor, repulsed in front, harassed upon the flanks, and in great danger of having his retreat cut off, he ordered a retreat which strongly resembled a rout, and, having narrowly escaped falling into his enemy's hands, succeeded with great difficulty in reaching Barcelona, where he arrived without men or money.

Thereupon all those who were awaiting the issue of his expedition to declare themselves declared against Charles V. Henry VIII. cast off his wife, Catherine of Aragon, in order to espouse his mistress, Anne Boleyn Soliman attacked the kingdom of Naples and Hungary. The Protestant princes of Germany entered into a secret league against the Emperor. Lastly, the people of Ghent, weary of the incessant burdens imposed upon them to defray the expense of the war against France, suddenly rose in revolt, and sent ambassadors to François to invite him to place himself at their head.

But amid this universal upheaval, which threatened to destroy the Emperor's fortunes, new negotiations were entered upon by the King of France and himself. The two monarchs had an interview at Aigues-Mortes, and François, bent upon peace, which he felt to be an absolute necessity for France, was determined thenceforth to rely upon friendly negotiations to effect his objects, and not upon an armed struggle.

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He therefore caused Charles to be informed of the proposition of the men of Ghent, offering him at the same time liberty to pass through France on his way to Flanders.

The council had been called together to discuss this subject, when Benvenuto knocked at the door, and François, true to his promise, as soon as he was advised of the great artist's presence, ordered that he be admitted. Benvenuto therefore heard the end of the discussion.

"Yes, messieurs," François was saying, "yes, I agree with Monsieur de Montmorency, and it is my dream to conclude a lasting alliance with the Emperor elect, to raise our two thrones above all the rest of Christendom, and to wipe out all these corporations, communes, and popular assemblies which assume to set bounds to our royal power by refusing us to-day the arms, to-morrow the money, of our subjects. My dream is to force back into the bosom of the true religion all the heresies which distress our holy Mother Church. My dream is, lastly, to unite all our forces against the enemies of Christ, to drive the Turkish Sultan from Constantinople, were it only to prove that he is not, as he is alleged to be, my ally, and to establish at Constantinople a second empire rivalling the first in power, in splendor, and in extent. That is my dream, messieurs, and I have given it that name so that I may not allow myself to be unduly exalted by hope of success, nor unduly cast down if the future shall demonstrate, as it may, its impracticability. But if it should be fulfilled, constable, if it should be fulfilled, if I were to have France and Turkey, Paris and Constantinople, the Occident and the Orient, confess, messieurs, that it would be grand, — that it would be sublime!"

"I understand, then, Sire," said the Duc de Guise,

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"that it is definitely decided that you decline the suzerainty proffered you by the Ghentese, and that you renounce the former domains of the house of Burgundy?"

"It is so decided: the Emperor shall see that I am an ally as loyal as I am a loyal foe. But first of all, and in any event, I desire and shall demand that the Duchy of Milan be restored to me: it belongs to me by hereditary right and by imperial investiture, and I will have it, on my honor as a gentleman, but, I trust, without breaking with my brother Charles."

"And you will offer to allow Charles V. to pass through France on his way to Ghent to chastise the rebels?" asked Poyet.

"Yes, Monsieur le Chancelier," was the king's reply; "despatch M. de Fréjus to-day to extend the invitation in my name. Let us show him that we are disposed to go any length to maintain peace. But if he prefers war —"

A majestic, awe-inspiring gesture accompanied this phrase, interrupted for an instant as François caught sight of his artist standing modestly near the door.

"But if he prefers war," he resumed, "by my Jupiter, of whom Benvenuto brings me news, I swear that it shall be war bloody, desperate, and terrible! Well, Benvenuto, where is my Jupiter?"

"Sire," replied Cellini, "I bring you the model of your Jupiter: but do you know of what I was dreaming as I looked at you and listened to you? I was dreaming of a fountain for your Fontainebleau,— a fountain to be surmounted by a colossal statue sixty feet high, holding a broken lance in its right hand, and with the left resting on its sword hilt. This statue, Sire, should represent Mars, — that is to say, your Majesty; for your nature is all courage, and you use your courage judi-

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ciously, and for the defence of your glory. Stay, Sire, that is not all: at the four corners of the base of the statue there should be four seated figures, — Poetry, Painting, Sculpture, and Generosity. Of that I was dreaming as I looked at you and listened to you, Sire."

"And you shall cause your dream to live in marble or bronze, Benvenuto: such is my wish," said the king in a commanding tone, but with a cordial, kindly smile.

All the members of the council applauded, for all deemed the king worthy of the statue, and the statue worthy of the king.

"Meanwhile," said the king, "let us see our Jupiter."

Benvenuto drew the model from beneath his cloak, and placed it upon the table, around which the destiny of the world had so recently been debated.

François gazed at it for a moment with undisguised admiration.

"At last!" he cried, "at last I have found a man after my own heart. My friend," he continued, laying his hand upon Benvenuto's shoulder, "I know not which of the two experiences the greater happiness, the prince who finds an artist who thoroughly sympathizes with and understands all his ideas, such an artist as yourself in short, or the artist who meets a prince capable of appreciating him. I think that my pleasure is the greater, upon my word."

"Oh no, Sire, permit me!" cried Cellini; "surely mine is much the greater."

"No, mine, Benvenuto."

"I dare not contradict your Majesty, and yet — "

"Let us say that we experience an equal amount of pleasure, my friend."

"You have called me your friend, Sire," said Benvenuto; "that is a word which pays me a hundred times

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over for all that I have done or can ever do for your Majesty."

"Very well! it is my purpose to prove to you, Benvenuto, that it was no empty, meaningless word that escaped me, and that I called you my friend because you are my friend in fact. Bring me my Jupiter completed as soon as possible, and whatever you may ask of me when you bring it, upon my honor as a gentleman, you shall have if a king's hand can procure it for you. Do you hear, messieurs? If I forget my promise, remind me of it."

"Sire," cried Benvenuto, "you are a great and a noble king, and I am ashamed that I am able to do so little for you, who do so much for me."

Having kissed the hand the king held out to him, Cellini replaced the statue of Jupiter under his cloak, and left the council chamber with his heart overflowing with pride and joy.

As he left the Louvre, he met Primaticcio about to go in.

"Whither go you so joyously, my dear Benvenuto?" he said, as Cellini hastened along without seeing him.

"Ah! Francesco, is it you?" cried Cellini. "Yes, you are quite right. I am joyous indeed, for I have just seen our great, our sublime, our divine François I. —"

"And did you see Madame d'Etampes?" queried Primaticcio.

"Who said things to me, Francesco, that I dare not repeat, although they say that modesty is not my strong point."

"But what did Madame d'Etampes say to you?"

"He called me his friend, Francesco, do you understand? He talked to me as familiarly as he talks to his marshals. Finally, he said that when my Jupiter is

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finished I may ask whatever favor I choose, and it is accorded in advance."

"But what did Madame d'Etampes promise you?"

"What a strange man you are, Francesco!"

"Why so?"

"You persist in talking about Madame d'Etampes when I speak of the king."

"Because I know the court better than you do, Benvenuto; because you are my countryman and my friend: because you have brought me a breath of air from our dear Italy, and in my gratitude I desire to save you from a great danger. Mark what I say, Benvenuto: the Duchesse d'Etampes is your enemy, your mortal enemy. I have told you this before, when I only feared it; I repeat it to-day, when I am perfectly sure of it. You have offended her, and if you do not appease her, Benvenuto, she will ruin you. Benvenuto, mark well what I say: Madame d'Etampes is the king's queen."

"Mon Dieu, what is all this?" cried Cellini, with a laugh. "I have offended Madame d'Etampes! how so, in God's name?"

"Oh, I know you, Benvenuto, and I supposed that you knew no more than I or the woman herself as to the cause of her aversion to you. But what can we do? Women are so constituted; they hate as they love, without knowing why, and the Duchesse d'Etampes hates you."

"What would you have me do?"

"What would I have you do! I would have the courtier rescue the sculptor."

"I, the courtier of a courtesan!"

"You are wrong, Benvenuto," said Primaticcio, smiling: "Madame d'Etampes is very beautiful, as every artist must admit."

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"I admit it," said Benvenuto.

"Very well, go and say so to herself, and not to me. I ask nothing more than that to make you the best friends in the world. You have wounded her by some artist's whim, and it is your place to make the first advances toward her."

"If I wounded her," said Cellini, "I did it unintentionally, or rather without malice. She said some bitter words to me which I did not deserve; I put her back where she belonged, and she did deserve it."

"Never mind, never mind! forget what she said, Benvenuto, and make her forget your reply. I tell you again she is imperious and vindictive, and she has the king's heart in her hand, — a king who loves art, it is true, but who loves love more. She will make you repent your audacity, Benvenuto; she will make enemies for you; she it was who inspired the provost with courage to resist you. And listen: I am just setting out for Italy; I am going to Rome by her command; and my journey, Benvenuto, is aimed at you, — I, your friend, am compelled to become the instrument of her spleen."

"What are you to do at Rome?"

"What am I to do there? You have promised the king to emulate the ancients, and I know that you are a man to keep your promise. But the duchess thinks you a braggart, and with a view of crushing you by the comparison no doubt, she is sending me, a painter, to Rome to make casts of the most beautiful of the ancient statues, the Laocoön, the Venus, the Knife-Grinder, and God knows what!"

"That is, indeed, refinement of hatred," said Benvenuto, who, notwithstanding his good opinion of himself, was not altogether confident of the result of a comparison of his work with that of the great masters;

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"but to yield to a woman," he added, clenching his fists, "never! never!"

"Who spoke of yielding? I will show you an excellent way to accomplish it. She is pleased with Ascanio; she wishes to employ him, and has instructed me to bid him call upon her. Now, nothing could be simpler than for you to accompany your pupil to the Hôtel d'Etampes and introduce him yourself to the fair duchess. Seize the opportunity; take with you one of those marvellous jewels which you alone can make, Benvenuto; show it to her first, and when you see her eyes glisten as she looks at it, offer it to her as an unworthy tribute to her beauty. She will accept, will thank you gracefully, and will in return make you some present worthy of you and take you back into favor. If, on the other hand, you have that woman for an enemy, abandon henceforth all the great things of which you are dreaming. Alas! I too have been compelled to stoop for a moment, only to rise to my full stature immediately. Until then that dauber Rosso was preferred to me; he was put forward everywhere, and always over my head. They made him Intendant of the Crown."

"You are unjust to him, Francesco," said Cellini, unable to conceal his real thought; "he is a great painter."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"And so am I sure of it," said Primaticcio, "and that is just why I hate him. They were using him to crush me; I flattered their wretched vanity, and now I am the great Primaticcio, and they are using me to crush you. Do as I did, therefore, Benvenuto; you will never repent having followed my advice. I implore you for your own sake and mine, I implore you in the name

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of your renown and your future, both of which you will compromise if you persist in your obstinacy."

"It is hard," said Cellini, who was, however, perceptibly weakening in his determination.

"If not for yourself, Benvenuto, for the sake of our great king. Do you wish to tear his heart by compelling him to choose between a mistress he adores, and an artist he admires?"

"Very well! so be it! For the king's sake I will do it!" cried Cellini, overjoyed to find a pretext which would spare his self-esteem.

"*A la bonne heure!*" said Primaticcio. "You understand, of course, that if a single word of this conversation should be repeated to the duchess, it would cause my ruin."

"Oh! I trust that you have no fears on that score."

"If Benvenuto gives his word, all is said."

"You have it."

"In that case, adieu, brother."

"A pleasant journey to you."

"And good luck to you."

The two friends, having exchanged a cordial grasp of the hand, parted, each with a gesture which summarized their whole conversation.

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XIII.

SOUVENT FEMME VARIE.

The Hôtel d'Etampes was not far from the Hôtel de Nesle. Our readers will not be surprised therefore at our rapid flight from one to the other.

It was located near the Quai des Augustins, and extended the whole length of Rue Gilles-le-Gueux, which was at a later date sentimentally christened Rue Gît-le-Cœur. The principal entrance was upon Rue de l'Hirondelle. François I. had presented it to his mistress to induce her to become the wife of Jacques Desbrosses, Comte de Penthièvre, as he had given the dukedom of Etampes and the government of Bretagne to Jacques Desbrosses, Comte de Penthièvre, to induce him to marry his mistress.

The king had spared no pains to render his gift worthy of the lovely Anne d'Heilly. He had caused the old edifice to be refurbished and made over according to the latest style.

Upon its frowning façade the delicate flowers of the Renaissance sprang into life by magic, like so many thoughts of love. It was evident from the zeal displayed by the king in the decoration of this princely abode, that he anticipated passing almost as much of his time there as the duchess herself. The apartments were furnished with royal magnificence, and the whole establishment was upon the footing of that of a real queen,

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much more extensive and luxurious, indeed, than that of the chaste and kindly Eleonora, sister of Charles V. and the lawful wife of François I., who was a personage of so little importance in the world, as well as at the French court.

If we are so indiscreet as to make our way into the duchess's sleeping apartment early in the morning, we shall find her half reclining upon a couch, her charming head supported by one of her lovely hands, and passing the other carelessly through her chestnut locks, which shone with a golden light. Her bare feet seem even smaller and whiter than they really are in her wide black velvet slippers, and her floating, *négligée* morning gown lends an irresistible charm to the coquette's fascinations.

The king is in the room, standing by a window, but he is not looking at his duchess. He is tapping his fingers rhythmically against the glass, and seems to be deep in meditation. He is thinking, no doubt, of the momentous question of Charles V.'s journey through France.

"Pray what are you doing there, Sire, with your back turned?" the duchess finally asks, petulantly.

"Making verses for you, my love, and they are finished at last, I believe."

"Oh, repeat them to me quickly, I pray you, my gallant crowned poet!"

"That I will," the king replies, with the confidence of a laurel-crowned rhymer. "Listen: —

'Etant seul et auprès d'une fenêtre,
Par un matin comme le jour peignait,
Je regardais Aurore à main senestre,
Qui à Phœbus le chemin enseignait,
Et d'autre part ma mie qui peignait
Son chef doré, et vis ses luisans yeux,

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Dont un jeta un trait si gracieux,
Qu'à haute voix je fus contraint de dire;
Dieux immortels! rentrez dedans vos cieux,
Car la beauté de ceste vous empire!'"[1]

"Oh, the lovely verses!" says the duchess, clapping her hands. "Look at Aurora to your heart's content: henceforth I 'll not be jealous of her, since to her I owe such charming verses. Say them to me once again, I beg."

François obligingly repeated his flattering lines, for his own benefit as well as hers, but this time Anne said nothing.

"What is the matter, my fair siren?" said François, who expected a second compliment.

"The matter is, Sire, that I am considering whether I will say to you again even more emphatically what I said last evening: a poet has even less pretext than a knightly king for allowing his mistress to be insulted, for she is at the same time his mistress and his Muse."

"Again, naughty one!" rejoined the king with an impatient gesture: "an insult indeed, bon Dieu! Your wrath is implacable, in good sooth, my nymph of nymphs, when it leads you to neglect my verses."

"Monseigneur, I hate as warmly as I love."

[1] Standing alone beside my window,
One morning as the day was breaking,
I saw at my left hand Aurora
To Phœbus pointing out his daily road;
And on the other hand my sweetheart combing
Her golden locks; I saw her beaming eyes
That shone so lovingly upon me,
That I was fain to cry aloud:
"Immortal Gods! return to your abodes celestial,
Her loveliness doth put yours to the blush."

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"And yet suppose I were to beg you to lay aside your animosity to Benvenuto, — a great fool, who knows not what he says, who talks just as he fights, heedless of consequences, and who had not, I swear, the slightest purpose to wound you. You know, moreover, that clemency 's the attribute of goddesses, dear goddess mine, so pray forgive the simpleton for love of me!"

"Simpleton, indeed!" muttered Anne.

"Oh, a sublime simpleton, I grant you!" said François: "I saw him yesterday, and he promised to do marvellous things. He is a man, I verily believe, who has no rival in his art, and will hereafter shed as much lustre on my reign as Andrea del Sarto, Titian, and Leonardo da Vinci. You know how I love my artists, dearest duchess, so be complaisant and indulgent to him, I beg you. Mon Dieu! an April shower, a woman's caprice, and an artist's whim have more of fascination than of ennui for me. Come, come, do you, whom I do love so dearly, pardon at my bidding."

"I am your servant, Sire, and I will obey you."

"Thanks. In return for this favor accorded by the woman's kindly heart, you may demand such gift as pleases you that lies within the prince's power to bestow. But, alas! 't is growing late, and I must leave you. The council meets again to-day. 'T is an insufferable bore! Ah! my good brother Charles makes the king's trade most irksome to me. With him cunning replaces chivalry, the pen the sword; and 't is a burning shame. Upon my soul, I think we need new words to be devised for all this science and erudition of government. Adieu! my poor beloved. I will do my best to be adroit and clever. You are very fortunate, my dear, for you have only to remain beautiful, and Heaven has made that an easy task for you. Adieu! nay, do not rise, my page is

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waiting for me in the antechamber. *Au revoir*, and think of me."

"As always, Sire."

François waved a last farewell to her with his hand, raised the hangings, and went out, leaving the fair duchess alone; and she, true to her promise, began at once, if we must say it, to think of other things.

Madame d'Etampes was of an impulsive, active, ambitious nature. Having eagerly sought and gallantly won the king's love, it was not long before that love ceased to satisfy her restless spirit, and she began to suffer from ennui. Neither Admiral Biron, nor the Comte de Longueval, whom she loved for some time, nor Diane de Poitiers, whom she always hated, furnished a sufficient amount of excitement for her needs; but within a week the void in her heart had been measurably filled, and she had begun to live again, thanks to a new hate and a new love. She hated Cellini and loved Ascanio, and she was thinking of one or the other while her women were completing her toilet.

When she was fully dressed except as to her headgear, the Provost of Paris and the Vicomte de Marmagne were announced.

They were among the most devoted partisans of the duchess in the warfare which existed at court between the Dauphin's mistress, Diane de Poitiers, and herself. One is naturally glad to see one's friends when thinking of one's enemies, and the manner of Madame d'Etampes was infinitely gracious as she gave the scowling provost and the smiling viscount her hand to kiss.

"Messire le Prévôt," she began, in a tone in which unfeigned wrath was blended with compassion that contained no suggestion of offence, "we have been informed of the infamous treatment you have received from this

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Italian clown,— you, our best friend,— and we are extremely indignant."

"Madame," replied D'Estourville, neatly turning his misfortune into an occasion for flattery, "I should have been ashamed if one of my years and character had been spared by the villain who was not deterred by your beauty and charm."

"Oh!" said Anne, "I think only of you; as to the insult to me personally, the king, who is really too indulgent to these insolent foreigners, has begged me to forget it, and I have done so."

"In that case, madame, the request we have to make will doubtless be but ill received, and we ask your permission to withdraw without stating it."

"What, Messire d'Estourville! am I not at your service at all times, and whatever may happen? Speak! speak! or I shall lose my temper with so distrustful a friend."

"Very well, madame, this is what we have to say. I had believed that I might dispose of this grant of lodgings which I owe to your munificence in favor of the Vicomte de Marmagne, and naturally we cast our eyes upon the Hôtel de Nesle, which has fallen into such bad hands."

"Aha!" said the duchess. "You interest me immensely."

"The viscount, madame, accepted my suggestion in the first place with the utmost enthusiasm; but now, upon reflection, he hesitates, and thinks with terror of the redoubtable Benvenuto."

"Pardon me, my good friend," the viscount interposed, —"pardon me, you explain the matter very ill. I am not afraid of Benvenuto, but of the anger of the king. I have no fear of being killed by the Italian clown, to

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use madame's words,— no, no! What I fear, so to speak, is that I may kill him, and that some ill may come to me for having deprived our lord and master of a servitor by whom he seems to set great store."

"I ventured to hope, madame, that, in case of need, your protection would not fail him."

"It has never yet failed my friends," said the duchess; "and, furthermore, have you not on your side a better friend than I, — justice? Are you not acting in accordance with the king's will?"

"His Majesty," Marmagne replied, "did not himself designate the Hôtel de Nesle as the abode of any other than Benvenuto, and our choice, under those circumstances, would seem very much like revenge,— there 's no denying it. And then, suppose that I kill this Cellini, as I can promise to do, for I shall have two sure men with me?"

"Oh! mon .Dieu!" exclaimed the duchess, showing her white teeth as she smiled, "the king's protection extends to living men, but I fancy that he takes but little thought to avenge the dead, and when his admiration for art is deprived of this particular subject, he will remember naught save his affection for me, I trust. The man insulted me publicly and outrageously, Marmagne! do you forget it?"

"But, madame," rejoined the prudent viscount, "be very sure that you know all you will have to defend."

"Oh, you are perfectly clear, viscount."

"Nay, madame, if you will permit me, I do not wish to leave you in ignorance upon any point. It may be that force will fail to effect our purpose with this devil of a man. In that event, we shall have recourse to stratagem; if he escapes my bravos in his Hôtel in broad daylight, they will meet him again some night by

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accident in a lonely street, and — they have daggers, madame, as well as swords."

"I understand," said the duchess, nor did she turn a shade paler while listening to this little scheme of assassination.

"Well, madame?"

"Well, viscount, I see that you are a man of precautions, and that it's not well to be numbered among your enemies, deuce take me!"

"But touching the affair itself, madame?"

"'T is serious, in very truth, and is perhaps worth reflecting upon; but what was I saying? Every one knows, the king himself included, that this man has wounded me grievously in my pride. I hate him as bitterly as I hate my husband or Madame Diane, and i' faith I think that I can promise you — What is it, Isabeau? why do you interrupt us?"

The duchess's last words were addressed to one of her women, who entered hurriedly in a state of intense excitement.

"Mon Dieu! madame," said she, "I ask madame's pardon, but the Florentine artist, Benvenuto Cellini, is below with the loveliest little golden vase you can imagine. He said very courteously that he has come to present it to your ladyship, and he requests the favor of speaking with you a moment."

"Aha!" exclaimed the duchess, with an expression of gratified pride; "what reply did you make to him, Isabeau?"

"That madame was not dressed, and that I would go and inform her of his presence."

"Very good. It would seem," the duchess added, turning to the dismayed provost, "that our enemy sees the error of his ways, and begins to realize who we are,

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and what we can do. All the same, he will not come off so cheaply as he thinks, and I don't propose to accept his excuses all in a moment. He must be made to feel the enormity of his offence and the weight of our indignation a little more sensibly. Say to him, Isabeau, that you have informed me, and that I bid him wait."

Isabeau went out.

"I was saying, Vicomte de Marmagne," resumed the duchess, with a perceptible softening in her tone, "that what you were speaking of is a very serious matter, and that I could hardly promise to give my countenance to what is, after all, nothing less than ambuscade and murder."

"But the insult was so pronounced!" the provost ventured to say.

"The reparation will be no less so, I trust, messire. This famous pride, which has resisted the will of sovereigns, is yonder in my antechamber awaiting the good pleasure of a woman, and two hours of this purgatory will, in all conscience, sufficiently atone for an impertinent word. We must not be altogether pitiless, provost. Forgive him, as I shall forgive him two hours hence. Ought my influence over you to be less than the king's over me?"

"Kindly permit us to take leave now, madame," said the provost, bowing, "for I prefer not to make a promise to my real sovereign which I could not keep."

"Take your leave! oh no!" said the duchess, who was determined to have witnesses of her triumph. "I intend, Messire le Prévôt, that you shall be present at the humiliation of your enemy, and thus we shall both be avenged by the same stroke. I devote the next two hours to you and the viscount; nay, do not thank me. They say that you are marrying your daughter to Comte

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d'Orbec, I believe? — a beautiful *parti*, in sooth. Fine, I should have said, not beautiful.[1] Pray, sit you down, messire! Do you know that my consent is needful for this marriage, and you 've not asked it yet, but I will give it you. D'Orbec is as devoted to me as yourself. I hope that we are at last to see your lovely child, and have her for our own, and that her husband will not be so ill advised as not to bring her to court. What is her name, messire?"

"Colombe, madame."

"A sweet, pretty name. 'T is said that one's name has an influence upon one's destiny: if it be so, the poor child should have a tender heart, and be foredoomed to suffer. Well, Isabeau, what is it now?"

"Nothing, madame; he said that he would wait."

"Ah, yes! 't is well. I had forgotten him already. Yes, yes, messire, I say again, keep your eye on Colombe; the count 's a husband of the same sort as mine, as ambitious as the Duc d'Etampes is avaricious, and quite capable of exchanging his wife for some duchy. And then you must be beware of me as well, especially if she 's as pretty as she 's said to be! You will present her to me, will you not, messire? 'T will be no more than fair, so that I may be prepared to defend myself."

The duchess, exultant in anticipation of her triumph, ran on thus for a long while with apparent unconcern, although her impatient joy could be discerned in her every movement.

"Well, well," she said at last, "another half-hour and the two hours will have passed; then we will release poor Benvenuto from his agony. Put yourselves in his place; he must suffer terribly, for he is little wonted to

[1] "Je dis *beau*, c'est *bon* que je devrais dire."

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this sort of sentry-go. To him the Louvre is always open, and the king always visible. In truth, I pity him, although he well deserves it. He must be gnashing his teeth, must he not? And then to be unable to give vent to his anger. Ha! ha! ha! I shall have many a hearty laugh over this. But what is that I hear? Bon Dieu! all that shouting and uproar!"

"May it not be that the soul of the damned is wearying of Purgatory?" suggested the provost, with renewed hope.

"I propose to go and see," said the duchess, turning pale. "Come with me, my masters, come."

Benvenuto, persuaded by the arguments we have heard to make his peace with the all-powerful favorite, on the day following his conversation with Primaticcio took the little golden vase as a peace-offering, and repaired to the Hôtel d'Etampes, with Ascanio leaning on his arm, still very weak and very pale after a night of suffering. In the first place, the footmen refused to announce him at so early an hour, and he lost a good half-hour parleying with them. He had already begun to lose his temper, when Isabeau at last made her appearance, and consented to announce him to her mistress. She returned to say to Benvenuto that the duchess was dressing, and he must wait a short time. He took patience, therefore, and sat himself down upon a stool beside Ascanio, who was considerably overdone by the walk, in conjunction with his fever and his painful thoughts.

An hour passed. Benvenuto began to count the minutes. "After all," he thought, "the toilette of a duchess is the most important function of the day, and I don't propose to lose the benefit of the step I have taken for a quarter of an hour more or less."

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Nevertheless, in the face of this philosophical reflection, he began to count the seconds.

Meanwhile Ascanio turned paler and paler; he was determined to say nothing to his master of his sufferings, and had accompanied him without a word; but he had eaten nothing that morning, and, although he refused to acknowledge it, he felt that his strength was failing him.

Benvenuto could not remain seated, but began to stalk up and down the room.

A quarter of an hour passed.

"Are you suffering, my child?" he asked.

"No, master, indeed I 'm not: you are the one who is suffering. Be patient, I beg you, for she cannot be long now."

At that moment Isabeau appeared again.

"Your mistress is very slow," said Benvenuto.

The mischievous girl went to the window, and looked at the clock in the courtyard.

"Why, you have waited only an hour and a half," she said; "why do you complain, pray?"

As Cellini frowned, she laughed in his face, and tripped away.

Benvenuto, by a violent effort, subdued his wrath once more. But in order to do it he was obliged to resume his seat, and sat with folded arms, silent and stern. He seemed calm; but his wrath was fermenting silently. Two servants stood like statues at the door, observing him with a serious expression, which seemed to him derisory.

The clock struck the quarter. Benvenuto glanced at Ascanio, and saw that he was paler than ever, and almost ready to faint.

"Ah ça!" he cried, throwing his self-restraint to the

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winds, "so this is done designedly! I chose to believe what I was told, and wait good-naturedly: but if an insult is intended — and I am so little wonted to them, that the thought did not occur to me — if an insult is intended, I am not the man to allow myself to be insulted, even by a woman, and I go. Come, Ascanio."

As he spoke, Benvenuto, raising in his powerful hand the unhospitable stool, on which the duchess in her wrath had humiliated him for two mortal hours without his knowledge, let it fall to the floor and shattered it. The valets made a movement toward him, but he half drew his dagger and they stopped. Ascanio, terrified for his master, essayed to rise, but his excitement had exhausted what remained of his strength, and he fell to the floor unconscious. Benvenuto at first did not see him.

At that moment the duchess appeared in the doorway, pale and trembling with wrath.

"Yes, I go," Benvenuto repeated in a voice of thunder, perfectly well aware of her presence, but addressing the valets: "do you tell the woman that I take my present with me to give to somebody, I know not whom, who 'll be more worthy of it than herself. Tell her that, if she took me for one of her valets, like yourselves, she made a sad mistake, and that we artists do not sell our loyalty and homage as she sells her love! And now make way for me! Follow me, Ascanio!"

As he spoke, he turned toward his beloved pupil, and saw that his eyes were closed, and that his head had fallen back against the wall.

"Ascanio!" he cried, "Ascanio, my child, fainting, perhaps dying! O Ascanio, my beloved! and 't is this woman again — " And Benvenuto turned with a threatening gesture to Madame d'Etampes, at the same time starting to carry Ascanio away in his arms.

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The duchess meanwhile, transfixed with rage and terror, had not moved or spoken. But when she saw Ascanio with his head thrown back, and his long hair dishevelled, as white as marble, and so beautiful in his pallor, she rushed to him in obedience to an irresistible impulse, and fell on her knees opposite Benvenuto, seizing one of Ascanio's hands in her own.

"Why, the child is dying! If you take him away, monsieur, you will kill him. He may need immediate attention. Jerome, run and fetch Master André. I do not mean that he shall go from here in this condition, do you understand? You may go or stay, as you please, but leave him."

Benvenuto cast a penetrating glance at the duchess, and one of deep anxiety at Ascanio. He realized that there could be no danger in leaving his cherished pupil in the care of Madame d'Etampes, while there might be very serious danger in removing him without proper precaution. His mind was soon made up, as always, for swift and inexorable decision was one of Cellini's most striking good or bad qualities.

"You will answer for him, madame?" he said.

"Oh, with my life!" cried the duchess.

He softly kissed his apprentice on the forehead, and, wrapping his cloak about him, stalked proudly from the room, with his hand upon his dagger, not without exchanging a glance of hatred and disdain with the duchess. As for the two men, he did not deign to look at them.

Anne followed her enemy so long as she could see him with eyes blazing with wrath; then, with an entire change of expression, her eyes rested sadly and anxiously upon the comely invalid; love took the place of anger, the tigress became a gazelle once more.

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"Master André," she said to her physician, who entered hurriedly, "save him; he is wounded and dying."

"It is nothing," said Master André, "a mere passing weakness."

He poured upon Ascanio's lips a few drops of a cordial which he always carried about him.

"He is coming to himself," cried the duchess, "he moved. Now, master, he must be kept quiet, must he not? Take him into yonder room," she said to the valets, "and lay him upon a couch.— But, hark ye," she added, lowering her voice, so that none but they could hear: "if one word escapes you as to what you have seen and heard, your neck shall pay for your tongue. Go."

The trembling lackeys bowed, and, gently lifting Ascanio, bore him away.

Remaining alone with the provost and the Viscomte de Marmagne, prudent and passive spectators of the outrage upon her, Madame d'Etampes eyed them both, especially the latter, with a scornful glance, but she speedily repressed the inclination to express her contempt in words.

"I was saying, viscount," she began in a bitter tone, but calmly, "I was saying that the thing you proposed was very serious; but I did not reflect sufficiently upon it. I have sufficient power, I think, to permit me to strike down a traitor, even as I should have sufficient, if need were, to deal with indiscreet friends. The king would condescend to punish him this time, I trust; but I choose to avenge myself. Punishment would make the insult public; vengeance will bury it. You have been cool and clever enough, messieurs, to postpone my vengeance, in order not to compromise its success, and I

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congratulate you upon it. Be shrewd enough now, I conjure you, not to let it escape you, and do not compel me to have recourse to others than yourselves. Viscomte de Marmagne, it is necessary to speak plainly to you. I guarantee you equal impunity with the executioner; but if you care for my advice, I advise you and your sbirri to lay aside the sword, and trust to the dagger. Say nothing, but act, and that promptly; that is the most satisfactory response. Adieu, messieurs."

With these words, uttered in a short, abrupt tone, the duchess extended her hand as if to point out the door to the two noblemen. They bowed awkwardly, too confused to find words in which to frame an excuse, and left the room.

"Oh, to think that I am only a woman, and am obliged to resort to such dastards!" exclaimed Anne, looking after them while her lips curled disdainfully. "Oh how I despise them all, royal lover, venal husband, valet in silken doublet, valet in livery, — all save a single one whom in my own despite I admire, and another whom I delight to love!"

She entered the room to which the interesting invalid had been carried. As she approached the couch Ascanio opened his eyes.

"It was nothing," said Master André to the duchess. "The young man has received a wound in the shoulder, and fatigue, some mental shock, or hunger, it may be, caused a momentary faintness, from which he has completely recovered, as you see, by the use of cordials. He is fully restored now, and may safely be taken home in a litter."

"Very good," said the duchess, handing a purse to Master André, who bowed low and went out.

"Where am I?" said Ascanio, seeking to collect his thoughts.

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"You are with me, at my home, Ascanio," the duchess replied.

"At your home, madame? Ah! yes, I recognize you; you are Madame d'Etampes. And I remember too — Where is Benvenuto? Where is my master?"

"Do not stir, Ascanio; your master is safe, never fear. He is dining peaceably at home at the present moment."

"But how does it happen that he left me here?"

"You lost consciousness, and he trusted you to my care."

"And you assure me, madame, that he is in no danger; that he went from here unharmed?"

"I tell you again, I promise you, Ascanio, that he has never been less exposed to danger than at this moment. Ungrateful boy, when I, Duchesse d'Etampes, am watching over him and caring for him with the tender solicitude of a sister, to persist in speaking of his master!"

"O madame, I pray you pardon me, and accept my thanks!" said Ascanio.

"Indeed, it's high time!" rejoined the duchess, shaking her pretty head with a sly smile.

Thereupon she began to speak, giving to every word a tender intonation, and to the simplest phrases the subtlest of meanings, asking every question greedily and at the same time with respect, and listening to every reply as if her destiny depended upon it. She was humble, soft and caressing as a cat, quick to grasp every cue, like a consummate actress, leading Ascanio gently back to the subject if he wandered from it, and giving him all the credit for ideas which she evolved and cunningly led up to; seeming to distrust herself, and listening to him as if he were an oracle; exerting to the utmost the cultivated, charming intellect which, as we have said, caused

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her to be called the loveliest of blue-stockings and the most learned of beauties. In short, this interview became in her hands the most cajoling flattery, and the cleverest of seductions. As the youth for the third or fourth time made ready to take his leave, she said, still detaining him: —

"You speak, Ascanio, with so much eloquence and fire of your goldsmith's art, that it is a perfect revelation to me, and henceforth I shall see the conception of a master where I have hitherto seen only an ornament. In your opinion Benvenuto is the great master of the art?"

"Madame, he has surpassed the divine Michel-Angelo himself."

"I am pleased to hear it. You lessen the ill-will I bear him on account of his rude behavior to me.

"Oh! you must not mind his roughness, madame. His brusque manner conceals a most ardent and devoted heart; but Benvenuto is at the same time the most impatient and fiery of men. He thought that you were making him wait in mere sport, and the insult — "

"Say the mischief," rejoined the duchess with the simulated confusion of a spoiled child. "It is the truth that I was not dressed when your master arrived, and I simply prolonged my toilet a little. It was wrong, very wrong. You see that I confess my sins to you freely. I knew not that you were with him," she added eagerly.

"True, madame, but Cellini, who is not very sagacious, I admit, and whose confidence has been sadly abused, deems you to be — I may say it to you who are so gracious and kind — very wicked and very terrible, and he thought that he detected an insult in what was nothing more than child's play."

"Do you think so?" queried the duchess, unable wholly to repress a mocking smile.

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"Oh, forgive him, madame! he is noble-hearted and generous, and if he knew you as you are, believe me, he would ask your pardon for his error on his knees."

"Say no more, I pray you! Do you think to make me love him now? I bear him a grudge, I tell you, and, to begin with, I propose to raise up a rival."

"That will be difficult, madame."

"No, Ascanio, for you, his pupil, shall be the rival. Allow me, at least, if I must do homage to this great genius who detests me, to do it indirectly. Say, will you, of whose charming inventive talent Cellini himself boasts, refuse to place your talent at my service? And since you do not share your master's prejudices against my person, will you not prove it to me by consenting to assist in embellishing it?"

"Madame, all that I am and all the power I have is at your service. You are so kind to me, you have inquired with so much interest concerning my past and my hopes for the future, that I am henceforth devoted to you heart and soul."

"Child, I have done nothing yet, and I ask nothing from you at present except a little of your talent. Tell me, have you not seen some jewel of surpassing beauty in your dreams? I have superb pearls; into what marvellous creation would you like to transform them, my pretty wizard? Shall I confide to you an idea of my own? A moment since, as you lay in yonder room with pale cheeks and head thrown back, I fancied that I saw a beautiful lily whose stalk was bending in the wind. Make me a lily of pearls and silver to wear in my corsage," said the enchantress, placing her hand upon her heart.

"Ah! madame, such kindness —"

"Ascanio, do you care to repay my kindness, as you

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call it? Promise me that you will take me for your confidante, your friend, that you will hide nothing from me of your acts, your plans, your sorrows, for I see that you are unhappy. Promise to come to me when you stand in need of help or counsel."

"Why, madame, you bestow one favor more upon me, rather than ask a proof of my gratitude."

"However that may be, you promise?"

"Alas! I would have given you the promise yesterday, madame; for yesterday I might have thought that I might some day need your help or counsel; but to-day it is in no one's power to help me."

"Who knows?"

"I know, madame."

"Ah me! Ascanio, you are unhappy, you are unhappy, you cannot deceive me."

Ascanio sadly shook his head.

"You are disingenuous with a friend, Ascanio; 't is not well done of you," the duchess continued, taking the young man's hand, and softly pressing it.

"My master must be anxious, madame, and I am afraid that my presence discommodes you. I feel quite well again. Allow me to withdraw."

"How eager you are to leave me! Wait at least until a litter is prepared for you. Do not resist; it is the doctor's order, and my own."

Anne called a servant, and gave him the necessary orders, then bade Isabeau bring her pearls and some of her jewels, which she handed to Ascanio.

"Now I restore your freedom," she said; "but when you are fully restored to health, my lily will be the first thing you give your mind to, will it not? Meanwhile, think upon it, I beg you, and as soon as you have finished your design come and show it to me."

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"Yes, Madame la Duchesse."

"And do you not wish me to think upon how I can be of service to you, and to do whatever you wish, since you are doing for me what I wish? Come, Ascanio, come, my child, and tell me what you sigh for? For at your age one seeks in vain to still the beating of his heart, turn his eyes away, and close his lips, — one always sighs for something. Do you deem me to be so devoid of power and influence that you disdain to make me your confidante?"

"I know, madame," rejoined Ascanio, "that you enjoy all the power which you deserve. But no human power will avail to help me in my present plight."

"Tell me all the same," said the duchess; "I insist!" Then, with fascinating coquetry, softening her voice and her expression, she added, "I beseech you!"

"Alas! alas! madame," cried Ascanio, as his grief overflowed. "Alas! since you speak so kindly to me, and since my departure will cover my shame and tears, I will do, not as I should have done yesterday, address a prayer to the duchess, but make a confidante of the woman. Yesterday I would have said, 'I love Colombe, and I am happy!' To-day I will say, 'Colombe does not love me, and there is nothing left for me to do but to die!' Adieu, madame, and pity me!"

Ascanio hurriedly kissed Madame d'Etampes's hand, as she stood mute and motionless, and vanished.

"A rival! a rival!" said Anne, as if awaking from a dream; "but she does not love him, and he shall love me, for I will have it so! Oh yes! I swear that he shall love me, and that I will kill Benvenuto!"

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XIV.

WHEREIN IT IS PROVEN THAT SORROW IS THE GROUNDWORK OF THE LIFE OF MAN.

We ask pardon for the bitter misanthropy of this title. It is the fact that the present chapter will exhibit scarcely any other coherent principle than sorrow, and therein will resemble life. The reflection is not new, as a celebrated character in comic opera would say, but it is consoling, in that it will perhaps be accepted as an apology by the reader, whom we are about to lead, even as Virgil led Dante, from despair to despair.

No offence is intended either to the reader or to Virgil.

Our friends, in very truth, at the moment at which we have now arrived, were all, beginning with Benvenuto and ending with Jacques Aubry, plunged in melancholy, and we are about to see them gradually engulfed in the dark rising tide of sorrow.

We left Benvenuto exceedingly anxious concerning Ascanio's condition. On his return to the Grand-Nesle, he thought but little of the wrath of Madame d'Etampes, I promise you. His sole preoccupation was his dear invalid. So it was that his joy knew no bounds when the door opened to give admission to a litter, and Ascanio, leaping lightly to the ground, grasped his hand, and assured him that he was no worse than in the morning. But Benvenuto's brow quickly grew dark at the apprentice's first words, and he listened with an expression of peculiar dissatisfaction while the younger man said: —

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"Master, I propose to show you that you have done a wrong for which you must make amends, and I am sure that you will thank me instead of bearing me ill-will for it. You are mistaken with relation to Madame d'Etampes; she neither despises nor hates you; on the contrary, she honors and admires you, and you must agree that you were very rude in your treatment of her, — a woman and a duchess. Master, Madame d'Etampes is not only as beautiful as a goddess, she is as kind as an angel, modest and enthusiastic, simple-minded and noble, and at heart her disposition is lovely. What you deemed insulting insolence this morning was nothing more than childish mischief. I implore you, for your own sake — you surely would not be unjust — as well as for mine, whom she made welcome and cared for with such touching kindness, not to persist in your insulting contempt for her. I will answer for it that you will have no difficulty in persuading her — But you do not answer me, dear master. You shake your head. Can it be that I have wounded you?"

"Hark ye, my child," rejoined Benvenuto gravely. "I have often told you that in my view there is but one thing in the world forever beautiful, forever young, forever fruitful, and that is art divine. And yet, I think, I hope, I know, that in certain tender hearts love also counts for much, — a deep and noble sentiment, which may make happy a whole life; but it is very rare. For what is love in most cases? A fancy of a day, a joyous intimacy, in which both parties are deceived, and very often in the best of faith. I make sport of this love, as it is called, Ascanio, with great freedom as you know; I laugh at its high-flown pretensions and its stilted language. I do not slander it. To say truth, it rather pleases me; it has *in petto* all the joy, all

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the sweetness, all the jealousy of a serious passion, but its wounds are not mortal. Comedy or tragedy, after a certain time one hardly remembers it save as a sort of theatrical performance. And then, Ascanio, while women are charming creatures, to my mind all save a very few do not deserve and do not understand anything more than this passing fancy. To give them more, one must be a dupe or an imprudent fool. Take Scozzone, for example: if she should enter my heart, she would be terrified at what she saw therein; I leave her at the threshold, and she sings and dances, she is light of heart and happy. Moreover, Ascanio, these ever changing alliances have a less durable basis, which however is all-sufficient for the artist, — the worship of form, and the adoration of pure beauty. That is their serious side, and it is on account of that that I say no ill of them, although I laugh at them. But, Ascanio, mark this: there are other passions which do not make me laugh, but make me tremble, — terrible, insensate passions, as impossible as things we see in dreams."

"Mon Dieu!" thought Ascanio, "can he have learned aught of my mad passion for Colombe?"

"They afford neither pleasure nor happiness," continued Cellini, "and yet they take possession of one's whole being; they are vampires which slowly drink your whole existence, which devour your heart little by little; they hold you in a deathly embrace, and you cannot extricate yourself. Ascanio, Ascanio, beware of such a passion. 'T is clear that they are mere chimeras, and that they can in no way profit one, and yet men who know this well plunge into them body and soul, and abandon their lives to them almost with joy."

"He has that in his mind! he knows all!" said Ascanio to himself.

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"My dear son," pursued Benvenuto, "if there still is time, break these bonds which would hold you fast forever; you will bear the mark of them, but try at least to save your life."

"Who told you that I love her, in God's name?" demanded the apprentice.

"If you do not love her, God be praised!" exclaimed Benvenuto, thinking that Ascanio denied the impeachment, when he simply asked a question. "Beware at all events, for I saw this morning that she loves you."

"This morning! Of whom are you speaking? What do you mean?"

"Of whom am I speaking? of Madame d'Etampes."

"Madame d'Etampes!" echoed the bewildered apprentice. "Why, master you are wrong, it's not possible. You say that you saw that Madame d'Etampes loves me?"

"Ascanio, I am forty years old; I have lived, and I know whereof I speak. By her manner of looking at you, by the favorable opinion which she has succeeded in leading you to form of her, I would dare swear that she loves you; and from the enthusiasm with which you defended her just now I was much afraid that you had fallen in love with her as well. In that case, dear Ascanio, you would be lost: her love, hot enough to consume your whole being, when it left you, would leave you with no illusion, no faith, no hope, and you would have no other resource but to love others as you had been loved yourself, and to carry to other hearts the havoc that had been wrought in your own."

"Master," said Ascanio, "I do not know whether Madame d'Etampes loves me, but I am perfectly sure that I do not love Madame d'Etampes."

Benvenuto was no more than half convinced by As-

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canio's apparent sincerity, for he thought that he might be deceived as to his own feelings. He said nothing more on the subject, and in the days which followed often gazed at the apprentice with a sad face.

It should be said, however, that he did not seem to be troubled exclusively on Ascanio's account. He gave every indication of being tormented by some personal distress. He lost his frank, joyous manner, and no longer indulged in his original pranks of former days. He always secluded himself during the forenoon in his room over the foundry, and had given explicit orders that he should not be disturbed there. The rest of the day he worked at the gigantic statue of Mars with his accustomed ardor, but without talking about it with his accustomed effusiveness. Especially in Ascanio's presence did he seem gloomy, embarrassed, and almost shamefaced. He seemed to avoid his dear pupil as if he were his creditor or his judge. In short, it was easy to see that some great sorrow or some great passion had found its way into that manly heart, and was laying it waste.

Ascanio was hardly more happy; he was persuaded, as he had said to Madame d'Etampes, that Colombe did not love him. Comte d'Orbec, whom he knew only by name, was, in his jealous thoughts, a young and attractive nobleman, and Messire d'Estourville's daughter, the happy betrothed of a well favored, nobly born lover, had never for an instant thought of an obscure artist. Even if he had retained the vague and fleeting hope which never deserts a heart overflowing with love, he had himself destroyed his last chance if Madame d'Etampes was really in love with him, by disclosing to her the name of her rival. This proposed marriage, which she might perhaps have prevented, she would now do everything in

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her power to hasten forward; and poor Colombe would feel the full force of her hatred. Yes, Benvenuto was right; that woman's love was in very truth a terrible and deadly thing; but Colombe's love would surely be the sublime, celestial sentiment of which the master had first spoken, and alas! that immeasurable blessing was destined for another!

Ascanio was in despair; he had believed in Madame d'Etampes's friendship, and now it seemed that this deceitful friendship was a dangerous passion; he had hoped for Colombe's love, and it seemed that her supposititious passion was nothing more than indifferent friendship. He felt that he almost hated both these women, who had so falsified his dreams in that each of them regarded him as he would have liked to be regarded by the other.

Entirely absorbed by a feeling of hopeless discouragement, he did not once think of the lily ordered by Madame d'Etampes, and in his jealous anger he would not repeat his visit to the Petit-Nesle, despite the entreaties and reproaches of Ruperta, whose innumerable questions he left unanswered. Sometimes, however, he repented of the resolution he made on the first day, which was assuredly cruel to none but himself. He longed to see Colombe, to demand an explanation. But of what? Of his own extravagant visions! However, he would see her, he would think in his softer moments; he would confess his love to her as a crime, and she was so tender-hearted that perhaps she would comfort him as if it were a misfortune. But how explain his absence, how excuse himself in the maiden's eyes?

Ascanio allowed the days to pass in innocent, sorrowful reflections, and did not dare to take any decided step.

Colombe awaited Ascanio's coming with mingled terror

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and joy on the day following that on which Dame Perrine floored the apprentice with her direful revelation; but in vain did she count the hours and the minutes, in vain did Dame Perrine keep her ears on the alert. Ascanio, who had recovered in good time from his swoon, and might have availed himself of Colombe's gracious permission, did not come, attended by Ruperta, and give the preconcerted signal at the door in the wall of the Petit-Nesle. What did it mean?

It meant that Ascanio was ill, dying perhaps, at all events too ill to come. At least that was what Colombe thought; she passed the whole evening kneeling at her prie-Dieu, weeping and praying, and when she ceased to pray she found that she continued to weep. That discovery terrified her. The anxiety which oppressed her heart was a revelation to her. Indeed, there was sufficient cause for alarm, for in less than a month Ascanio had taken possession of her thoughts to such a degree as to make her forget her God, her father, and her misery.

But there was room in her mind for nothing now but this: Ascanio was suffering within two steps of her; he would die before she could see him. It was no time to reason, but to weep and weep. If he should be saved, she would reflect.

The next day it was still worse. Perrine watched for Ruperta, and as soon as she saw her leave the house rushed out to go to market for news far more than for supplies. Now Ascanio was no longer seriously ill; he had simply refused to go to the Petit-Nesle, without replying to Dame Ruperta's eager questions otherwise than by obstinately keeping silent. The two gossips were reduced to conjectures: such a thing was entirely incomprehensible to them.

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Colombe, however, did not seek long for the explanation; she said to herself at once: —

"He knows all: he has learned that in three months I shall be Comte d'Orbec's wife, and he has no wish to see me again."

Her first impulse was to be grateful to her lover for his anger, and to smile. Let him explain this secret joy who can; we are simply the historian. But soon, upon reflection, she took it ill of Ascanio that he was able to believe that she was not in despair at the thought of such a union.

"So he despises me," she said to herself.

All these impulses, indignant or affectionate, were very dangerous: they laid bare the heart which before knew not itself. Colombe said to herself aloud, that she did not desire to see Ascanio; but she whispered, that she awaited his coming to justify herself. She suffered in her timorous conscience; she suffered in her misapprehended love.

It was not the only passion which Ascanio did not understand. There was another more powerful, more impatient to make itself known, and which dreamed darkly of happiness, as hatred dreams of vengeance.

Madame d'Etampes did not believe, did not choose to believe, in Ascanio's profound passion for Colombe.

"A child who has no conception of what he really wants," she said to herself, "who falls in love with the first pretty girl he sees, who has come in collision with the high and mighty airs of an empty-headed little fool, and whose pride takes offence at the least obstacle. Oh! when he realizes what true love is, ardent, clinging love, — when he knows that I, Duchesse d'Etampes, whose caprice rules a kingdom, love him! — Ah! but he must know it!"

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The Vicomte de Marmagne and the Provost of Paris suffered in their hatred, as Anne and Colombe suffered in their love. They harbored mortal enmity to Benvenuto, — Marmagne especially. Benvenuto had caused him to be despised and humiliated by a woman; Benvenuto constrained him to be brave, for before the scene at the Hôtel d'Etampes the viscount might have had him poniarded by his people on the street, but now he must needs go and beard him in his own house, and Marmagne shuddered with dismay at the prospect. We do not readily pardon those who force us to realize that we are cowards.

Thus all were suffering, even Scozzone. Scozzone the madcap laughed and sang no more, and her eyes were often red with weeping. Benvenuto did not love her. Benvenuto was always cold, and sometimes spoke sharply to her.

Scozzone had for a long time had a fixed idea, which had become a monomania with her. She was determined to become Benvenuto's wife. When she first went to him, expecting to serve him as a plaything, and he treated her with all the consideration due a wife, and not as a mere light o' love, the poor child was greatly exalted by such unlooked for respect and honor, and at the same time she felt profoundly grateful to her benefactor, and unaffectedly proud to find herself so highly esteemed. Afterward, not at Benvenuto's command, but in response to his entreaty, she gladly consented to serve him as model, and by dint of seeing her own form and features so often reproduced, and so often admired, in bronze, in silver, and in gold, she had simply attributed half of the goldsmith's success to herself; for the lovely outlines, which were so loudly praised, belonged to her much more than to the master. She blushed with

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pleasure when Benvenuto was complimented upon the purity of the lines of this or that figure; she complacently persuaded herself that she was indispensable to her lover's renown, and had become a part of his glory, even as she had become a part of his heart.

Poor child! she did not dream that she had never been to the artist that secret inspiration, that hidden divinity, which every creator evokes, and which makes him a creator. Because Benvenuto copied her graceful attitudes, she believed in good faith that he owed everything to her, and little by little she took courage to hope that, after raising the courtesan to the rank of mistress, he would raise the mistress to the rank of wife.

As dissimulation was altogether foreign to her character, she had avowed her ambition in very precise terms. Cellini listened to her gravely, and replied,—

"This requires consideration."

The fact was that he would have preferred to return to the Castle of San Angelo at the risk of breaking his leg a second time in making his escape. Not that he despised his dear Scozzone; he loved her dearly, and sometimes a little jealously, as we have seen, but he adored art before everything, and his true and lawful wife was sculpture first of all. Furthermore, when he should be married, would not the husband depress the spirits of the gay Bohemian? Would not the *paterfamilias* interfere with the freedom of the sculptor? And, again, if he must marry all his models, he would commit bigamy a hundred times over.

"When I cease to love Scozzone, and to need her as a model," he said to himself, "I will find some worthy fellow for her, too short-sighted to look back into the past and to divine the future, who will see nothing but a lovely woman and the marriage portion I will give her.

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Thus I will satisfy her mania for wearing the name of wife, bourgeois fashion." For Benvenuto was convinced that Scozzone's desire was simply to have a husband, and that it mattered little to her who the husband might be.

Meanwhile, he left the ambitious damsel to take what comfort she could in her fancies. But since their installation at the Grand-Nesle, her eyes had been opened, and she realized that she was not so necessary to Cellini's life and work as she thought, for she could no longer with her gayety dispel the cloud of melancholy which overhung his brow, and he had begun to model a Hebe in wax for which she was not asked to pose. At last, the poor child — *horribile dictu!* — had essayed to play the coquette with Ascanio in Cellini's presence, and there had been not the slightest drawing together of the eyebrows to bear witness to the master's jealous wrath. Must she then bid farewell to all her blissful dreams, and become once more a poor, humiliated creature?

As to Pagolo, if any one cares to sound the depths of his heart, we venture to say that he had never been more gloomy and taciturn than of late.

It may be imagined that the hilarious student, Jacques Aubry, had escaped this contagious depression of spirits. Not at all; he had his own cause for repining. Simonne, after waiting a long while for him on the Sunday of the siege of Nesle, returned to the conjugal mansion in a rage, and had since stubbornly refused to meet the impertinent embryo lawyer upon any pretext whatsoever. He, in revenge, had withdrawn his custom from his capricious charmer's husband, but that disgusting tradesman evinced at the news no other sentiment than the keenest satisfaction; for although Jacques Aubry wore out his clothes quickly and recklessly — always excepting the pockets — we must add that his guiding economical maxim was never

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to pay for them. When Simonne's influence was no longer exerted as a counterpoise to the absence of money, the selfish tailor concluded that the honor of dressing Jacques Aubry did not compensate him for the loss he suffered by dressing him for nothing.

Thus our poor friend found himself at one and the same time bereft of his love and cut short in his supply of clothing. Luckily, as we have seen, he was not the man to wither away in melancholy. He soon fell in with a charming little consolation named Gervaise. But Gervaise was bristling all over with principles of all sorts, which to his mind were most absurd. She eluded him again and again, and he wore his heart out in devising means to bring the flirt to her senses. He almost lost the power to eat and drink, especially as his infamous landlord, who was own cousin to his infamous tailor, refused to give him credit.

Thus all whose names have figured prominently in these pages were sorely ill at ease, — from the king, who was very anxious to know whether Charles V. would or would not conclude to pass through France, to Dame Perrine and Dame Ruperta, who were much put out at their inability to continue their gossip. If our readers, like Jupiter of old, had the wearisome privilege of listening to all the complaints and all the wishes of mankind, they would hear a plaintive chorus something like this: —

Jacques Aubry: "If Gervaise would only cease to laugh in my face!"

Scozzone: "If Benvenuto would only have one pang of jealousy!"

Pagolo: "If Scozzone could only bring herself to detest the master!"

Marmagne: "If I might have the good fortune to surprise Cellini alone!"

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Madame d'Etampes: "If Ascanio only knew how I love him!"

Colombe: "If I could see him for one moment, — long enough to justify myself!"

Ascanio: "If she would only explain!"

Benvenuto: "If I dared confess my agony to Ascanio!"

All: "Alas! alas! alas!"

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XV.

WHEREIN IT APPEARS THAT JOY IS NOTHING MORE THAN SORROW IN ANOTHER FORM.

All these longings were to be gratified before the end of the week. But their gratification was destined to leave those who had formed them more unhappy and more melancholy than ever. Such is the universal law; every joy contains the germ of sorrow.

In the first place Gervaise ceased to laugh in Jacques Aubry's face; a change most ardently desired by the student, as the reader will remember. Jacques Aubry had discovered the golden fetters which were to bind the damsel to his chariot. They consisted in a lovely ring carved by Benvenuto himself, and representing two clasped hands.

It should be said that, since the day of the siege, Jacques Aubry had conceived a warm friendship for the outspoken and energetic nature of the Florentine artist. He did not interrupt him when he was speaking, — an unheard of thing! He kept his eyes fixed upon him and listened to him with respect, which was more than he had ever consented to do for his professors. He admired his work with an enthusiasm which, if not very enlightened, was at least very warm and sincere. On the other hand, his loyalty, his courage, and his jovial disposition attracted Cellini. He was just strong enough at tennis to make a good fight, but to lose in the end. He

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was his match at table, within a bottle. In short he and the goldsmith had become the best friends in the world, and Cellini, generous because his wealth was inexhaustible, had one day forced him to accept this little ring, which was carved with such marvellous skill that, in default of the apple, it would have tempted Eve, and sown discord between Peleus and Thetis.

On the morrow of the day when the ring passed from Jacques Aubry's hands to those of Gervaise, Gervaise resumed a serious demeanor, and the student hoped that she was his. Poor fool! on the contrary, he was hers.

Scozzone succeeded, as she desired, in kindling a spark of jealousy in Benvenuto's heart. This is how it came about.

One evening, when her wiles and coquetries had as usual failed to arouse the master from his imperturbable gravity, she assumed a solemn expression herself.

"Benvenuto," said she, "it seems to me, do you know, as if you had forgotten your promise to me."

"What promise is that, my dear child?" rejoined Benvenuto, apparently seeking an explanation of her reproach from the ceiling.

"Have n't you promised a hundred times to marry me?"

"I don't remember it."

"You don't remember it?"

"No; I should say that my only reply was, 'This requires consideration.'"

"Well! have you considered it?"

"Yes."

"With what result?"

"That I am still too young to be anything else than your lover, Scozzone. We will speak of it again later."

"And I am no longer foolish enough, monsieur, to be

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content with so vague a promise as that, and to wait for you forever."

"Do as you please, little one, and if you are in so great a hurry, go ahead."

"But what prejudice have you against marriage, after all? Why need it make any change in your life? You will have made a poor girl, who loves you, happy, that 's all."

"What change will it make in my life, Scozzone?" said Benvenuto gravely. "You see yonder candle, whose pale flame but feebly lights this great room where we are: I place an extinguisher over it, and now it is quite dark. Marriage would do the same to my life. Light the candle again, Scozzone: I detest the darkness."

"I understand," cried Scozzone volubly, bursting into tears, "you bear too illustrious a name to give to a poor girl, a nobody, who has given you her heart and her life, all that she had to give, and is ready to suffer everything for you, who lives only in your life, who loves only you —"

"I know it, Scozzone, and I assure you that I am as grateful as possible."

"Who has gladly done her best to enliven your solitude, who, knowing your jealous disposition, never looks at the cavalcades of handsome archers and sergeants, who has always closed her ears to the soft words which she has not failed to hear, nevertheless, even here."

"Even here?" rejoined Benvenuto.

"Yes, here, even here, do you understand?"

"Scozzone," cried Benvenuto, "it 's not one of my comrades, I trust, who has dared so to insult his master!"

"He would marry me if I would let him," continued Scozzone, attributing Cellini's wrath to a rejuvenescence of his love for her.

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"Scozzone, tell me the insolent varlet's name. It's not Ascanio, I hope."

"There is a man who has said to me more than a hundred times, 'Catherine, the master abuses you; he will never marry you, sweet and pretty as you are; he is too proud for that. Oh! if he loved you as I love you, or if you would love me as you love him!'"

"Give me his name, the traitor's name!" cried Benvenuto.

"But I simply would not listen to him," continued Scozzone, enchanted at the success of her stratagem; "on the contrary, all his soft words were wasted, and I threatened to tell you all if he kept on. I loved only you. I was blind, and the gallant got nothing by his fine speeches and his languishing looks. Oh, put on your indifferent air, and pretend not to believe me! it is all true, none the less."

"I do not believe you, Scozzone," said Benvenuto, who saw that, if he desired to know his rival's name, he must employ a very different method from any he had hitherto attempted.

"What, you don't believe me?"

"No."

"You think that I am lying?"

"I think that you are mistaken."

"In your opinion, then, it's not possible for any one to love me?"

"I don't say that."

"But you think it?"

Benvenuto smiled, for he saw that he had found a way to make Catherine speak.

"But there is some one who loves me, and that's the truth," continued Scozzone.

Benvenuto made another gesture indicating incredulity.

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"He loves me more than you ever loved me, more than you ever will love me, monsieur, do you understand?"

Benvenuto began to laugh heartily.

"I am very curious to know who this gallant Médor is," he said.

"His name is not Médor," retorted Catherine.

"What then, — Amadis?"

"Nor Amadis. His name is —"

"Galaor?"

"His name is Pagolo, if you must know."

"Aha! so it's Monsieur Pagolo!" muttered Cellini.

"Yes, it's Monsieur Pagolo," rejoined Scozzone, wounded by the contemptuous tone in which Cellini uttered his rival's name, — "a boy of good family, sedate, quiet, devout, and who would make a most excellent husband."

"Is that your opinion, Scozzone?"

"Yes, it is my opinion."

"And yet you have never given him any hope?"

"I have never listened to him. Oh! I was a great fool! But after this —"

"You are right, Scozzone; you should listen to him, and reply to him."

"How so? What's that you say?"

"I bid you listen when he speaks to you of love, and not turn him away. I will attend to the rest."

"But —"

"But, never fear, I have my plan."

"*A la bonne heure.* But I hope you don't propose to punish him very severely, poor devil; he acts as if he were confessing his sins when he says, 'I love you.' Play him a trick, if you choose, but not with your sword. I ask mercy for him."

"You will be content with my vengeance, Scozzone, for it will turn to your advantage."

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"In what way?"

"It will help to gratify one of your fondest desires."

"What do you mean, Benvenuto?"

"That is my secret."

"Oh, if you knew what an absurd figure he cuts when he tries to be tender!" said the volatile creature, incapable of remaining sad five minutes in succession. "And so, naughty man, you are still interested to know whether any one is paying court to your giddy girl? You do still love poor Scozzone a little?"

"Yes. But do not fail to follow the instructions I give you in regard to Pagolo to the letter."

"Oh, don't be afraid! I can play a part as well as another. It won't be long before he will say to me, 'Catherine, are you still cruel?' and I will reply, 'What! again, Monsieur Pagolo?' But in a not very indignant tone, you understand, — encouraging rather. When he sees that I am no longer harsh, he will think he's conquered the world. But what shall you do to him, Benvenuto? When shall you begin to take your revenge upon him? Will it be long drawn out, and very amusing? Shall we laugh?"

"Yes, we shall laugh," Benvenuto replied.

"And you will always love me?"

Benvenuto imprinted an assenting kiss upon her forehead, — the best of all answers, since it answers for everything without answering for anything.

Poor Scozzone did not suspect that Cellini's kiss was the beginning of his vengeance.

The Vicomte de Marmagne's wish that he might find Benvenuto alone was also gratified. This is how it came about.

Spurred on by the provost's anger, goaded by the memory of Madame d'Etampes's disdain, and influenced

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above all by his inordinate avarice, the viscount, having resolved to attack the lion in his den with the aid of his two sbirri, selected for his enterprise Saint Eloy's day, when the studio was likely to be deserted, as it was a holiday in the goldsmith's guild. He was proceeding along the quay, with his head high, and his heart beating fast, his two bravos walking ten steps behind him.

"Well, well!" said a voice at his side: "here's a fine young gentleman on amorous conquest bent, with his valorous bearing for the lady, and his two sbirri for the husband."

Marmagne turned, thinking that some one of his friends was speaking to him, but he saw only a stranger who was going in the same direction as himself, but whom in his absorption he had failed to observe.

"I'll wager that I have guessed the truth, my fair sir," continued the stranger. "I will bet my purse against yours, without knowing what it contains, that you are out on some such errand. Oh, tell me nothing! it's one's duty to be circumspect in love. My own name is Jacques Aubry; my profession, student; and I am on my way at present to an appointment with my sweetheart, Gervaise Philipot, a pretty girl, but, between ourselves, of appalling virtue, which suffered shipwreck, however, upon a certain ring. To be sure the ring was a jewel, and a jewel of marvellous workmanship, nothing less than one of Benvenuto Cellini's own!"

Until then the Vicomte de Marmagne had hardly listened to the confidences of his loquacious interlocutor, and had been careful not to reply. But his interest was aroused by the name of Benvenuto Cellini.

"One of Benvenuto Cellini's carvings! The devil! That's a royal gift for a student to make!"

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"Oh! pray understand, my dear baron — Are you baron, count, or viscount?"

"Viscount," said Marmagne, biting his lips at the impertinent familiarity with which the student assumed to address him, but anxious to find out if he could not procure some valuable information from him.

"Pray understand, my dear viscount, that I did not buy it. No, although I'm an artist in my way, I don't put my money into such trifles. Benvenuto himself gave it to me in acknowledgment of my lending him a hand last Sunday to take the Grand-Nesle from the provost."

"Then you are Cellini's friend?" Marmagne inquired.

"His most intimate friend, viscount, and I glory in it. Between ourselves it's a friendship for life and death. Doubtless you also know him?"

"Yes."

"You are very fortunate. A sublime genius, is he not, my dear fellow? Pardon me: I say, 'my dear fellow,' but it's simply my way of speaking; besides I think that I am nobly born, too, — at least my mother used to tell my father so whenever he beat her. However, I am, as I told you, the admirer, the confidant, the brother of the great Benvenuto Cellini, and consequently a friend to his friends, and a foe to his foes; for my sublime goldsmith does n't lack foes. In the first place Madame d'Etampes, secondly, the Provost of Paris, the old villain, and thirdly, a certain Vicomte de Marmagne, a great, lanky creature, whom you perhaps know, and who proposes, so they say, to take possession of the Grand-Nesle. Pardieu! he 'll have a warm reception!"

"Benvenuto has heard of his claim, has he?" queried Marmagne, beginning to take a very decided interest in the student's conversation.

"He has been warned; but — Hold! I must not tell

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you, so that the aforesaid Marmagne may receive the chastisement he deserves."

"From what you say I judge that Benvenuto is on his guard?"

"On his guard? why, Benvenuto is always on his guard. He has come within an ace of being assassinated, I don't know how many times; but, thank God, he has always come safely out of it!"

"What do you mean by on his guard?"

"Oh! I don't mean that he has a garrison, as that old poltroon of a provost had; no, no, quite the contrary. Indeed, he is entirely alone at this moment as all the fellows have gone to Vanvres for a holiday. I was to go myself, and play a game of tennis with him, dear Benvenuto. Unluckily Gervaise's convenience conflicted with the great artist's, and naturally, as you will agree, I gave the preference to Gervaise."

"In that case I will take your place with Benvenuto," said Marmagne.

"Do so; it will be a meritorious action on your part; go, my dear viscount, and say to Benvenuto from me that he will see me this evening. Three knocks, rather loud, is the signal, you know. He adopted that precaution on account of that great oaf of a Marmagne, who is likely, so he imagines, to try to play him some scurvy trick. Do you know this Vicomte de Marmagne?"

"No."

"Ah! so much the worse! You might have described him to me."

"What for?"

"So that I might suggest a little game with clubs to him, if I should fall in with him. I don't know why it is, but although I never saw him, do you know I particularly detest your Marmagne, my dear fellow, and if he

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ever falls in my way, I propose to pummel him in fine shape. But pardon me: here we are at the Augustins, and I am compelled to leave you. By the way, what is your name, my friend?"

The viscount walked away as if he did not hear the question.

"Aha!" said Jacques Aubry, "it seems that we prefer to remain *incog;* that's the purest chivalry, or I don't know myself. As you please, my dear viscount, as you please."

And Jacques Aubry thrust his hands in his pockets and strutted down Rue de Battoir, at the end of which Gervaise lived, whistling a student's song.

The Vicomte de Marmagne continued his journey toward the Grand-Nesle.

Benvenuto was in fact alone, as Jacques Aubry had said; Ascanio had wandered away, I know not where, to dream; Catherine had gone with Ruperta to visit one of her friends, and all the workmen and apprentices were holiday making at Vanvres.

The master was in the garden working at the clay model of his gigantic statue of Mars, whose colossal head could see the Louvre over the roofs of the Grand-Nesle, when little Jehan, who was on guard at the door for the day, deceived by Marmagne's manner of knocking, took him for a friend, and admitted him with his two sbirri.

If Benvenuto did not, like Titian, work with his coat of mail upon his back, he did, like Salvator Rosa, work with his sword at his side, and his carbine within reach of his hand. Marmagne therefore quickly discovered that he had gained very little by surprising him; he had simply surprised an armed man.

The viscount did not even try to dissemble his bravado born of poltroonery; and when Cellini, in an imperative

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tone which called for an immediate reply, demanded why he had come upon his premises, —

"I have no business with you," was his answer; "I am the Vicomte de Marmagne; I am the king's secretary, and here is an order from his Majesty," he added, holding a paper above his head, "which allots a portion of the Grand-Nesle to me; I am here to make provision for arranging to my taste that portion of the hotel which is allotted to me, and which I shall occupy henceforth."

With that, Marmagne, still followed by his two sbirri, stalked toward the door of the château.

Benvenuto seized his carbine, which was, as we have said, within his reach, and with one bound stood in front of the door on the stoop.

"Halt where you are!" he cried in a terrible voice, stretching out his right arm in Marmagne's direction; "one step more, and you 're a dead man!"

The viscount at once stopped short, although after these preliminaries we might perhaps have anticipated a desperate conflict.

But there are men to whom is given the power to strike terror to other men's hearts. There is an indescribable something in their look, their gestures, their attitude, as in the look, the gestures, and the attitude of the lion. The air about them is instinct with awe; their power is felt afar off. When they stamp upon the ground, clench their fists, knit their brows, or inflate their nostrils, the boldest hesitate to attack them. A wild beast, whose young are attacked, has but to bristle up and breathe noisily to make the assailant tremble. The men of whom we speak are living dangers. Valiant hearts recognize their like in them, and go straight forward to meet them, despite their secret emotion. But the weak, the timid, the cowardly, recoil at sight of them.

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Now Marmagne, as the reader has discovered, was not a valiant heart, and Benvenuto had all the appearance of a living danger.

And so when the viscount heard the redoubtable goldsmith's voice, and observed the imperial gesture of the arm extended toward him, he realized that death for himself and his two sbirri lay dormant in the carbine, the sword, and the dagger with which he was armed.

Furthermore, little Jehan, seeing that his master was threatened, had armed himself with a pike.

Marmagne felt that his game was up, and that he would be only too fortunate if he could extricate himself safe and sound from the wasps' nest he had stumbled upon.

"It 's all right! it 's all right! Messire Goldsmith," he said. "All that we wanted was to know whether you were or were not disposed to obey his Majesty's orders. You scoff at them, and refuse to abide by them! Very good! We shall apply to some one who will find a way to compel their execution. But do not hope that we shall do ourselves the honor of bargaining with you. *Bonsoir!*"

"*Bonsoir!*" said Benvenuto, with his hearty laugh. "Jehan, show these gentlemen out."

The viscount and his two sbirri shamefacedly retreated from the Grand-Nesle, cowed by one man, and shown out by a mere boy.

Such was the lamentable result of the fulfilment of the viscount's wish: "If only I could find Benvenuto alone!"

As he had been even more cruelly treated by fate in the matter of his desires than Jacques Aubry and Scozzone, who did not even yet detect the irony of destiny, our valorous viscount was furious.

"Madame d'Etampes was right," he said to himself,

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"and I am fain to follow the advice she gave me; I must break my sword and sharpen my dagger. This devil of a man is just what he is said to be, very intolerant, and not at all agreeable. I saw it written plainly enough in his eyes, that if I took another step I was a dead man; but in every lost cause there is a possibility of revenge. Look well to yourself, Master Benvenuto! look well to yourself!"

He proceeded to lay the blame upon his companions, who were tried men, however, and would have asked nothing better than to earn their money honestly, by slaying or being themselves slain: in retiring, they had simply obeyed their master's orders. They promised to give a better account of themselves in an ambuscade; but as Marmagne, to shield his own honor, claimed that the check he had met with was due to them, he informed them that he did not propose to accompany them in their next undertaking, and that they must go through with it alone as best they could. It was the very thing they most desired.

Having enjoined silence upon them concerning their recent experience, he called upon the Provost of Paris, and informed him that he had concluded that the surest way to avoid all suspicion was to postpone Benvenuto's punishment until some day when, as frequently happened, he ventured into a lonely, deserted street with a considerable sum of money, or some valuable piece of his handiwork. Then it would be believed that he had been murdered by robbers.

It now remains for us to see how the wishes of Madame d'Etampes, Ascanio, and Cellini were gratified to their increased sorrow.

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XVI.

A COURT.

MEANWHILE Ascanio had completed the design for his lily, and, perhaps from mere curiosity, perhaps under the influence of the magnet which attracts the wretched to those who sympathize with them, he at once repaired to the Hôtel d'Etampes. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, and just at that hour the duchess was sitting upon her throne, surrounded by a veritable court; but similar orders to those which were given at the Louvre relating to Benvenuto, were given at the Hôtel d'Etampes for Ascanio. He was therefore at once escorted to a reception-room, and his arrival was made known to the duchess.

She trembled with joy at the thought that the young man was about to see her in all her splendor, and gave certain orders in a low tone to Isabeau, who had brought her the message. Isabeau returned to Ascanio, took him by the hand without a word, led him into a corridor, raised a heavy curtain, and gently pushed him forward. He found himself in the duchess's salon, immediately behind the arm-chair of the sovereign of the mansion, who guessed his presence more by the thrill which ran through her whole being than by the rustling of the curtain, and gave him her fair hand to kiss over her shoulder, which his lips almost touched in the position in which he stood.

The lovely duchess was, as we have said, surrounded by a veritable court. At her right was seated the Duke

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of Medina-Sidonia, ambassador of Charles V.; Monsieur de Montbrion, governor of Charles d'Orléans, the king's second son, was at her left; the rest of the company sat in a circle at her feet.

With the leading personages of the kingdom — warriors, statesmen, magistrates, artists, — were assembled the leaders of the Protestant sect, which Madame d'Etampes secretly favored; great nobles all, and much courted, who had constituted themselves courtiers of the favorite. It was a gorgeous throng, and dazzling to the eyes at first sight. The conversation was enlivened with satirical remarks of all sorts concerning Diane de Poitiers, mistress of the Dauphin, and the bitter enemy of Madame d'Etampes. But Anne took no part in this petty warfare of quips and cranks, save by a word or two thrown in at random now and then, as, "Softly, messieurs, softly! no abuse of Madame Diane, or Endymion will be angry!" or, "Poor Madame Diane! she was married the day I was born!"

Except for these sparks with which she lighted up the conversation, Madame d'Etampes hardly spoke to anybody beside her two neighbors. She talked with them in undertones, but with great animation, and not so low that Ascanio, who was humble and abashed among so many great men, could not hear her.

"Yes, Monsieur de Montbrion," said she confidentially to her left-hand neighbor, "we must make an admirable prince of your pupil; he is the real king of the future, you know. I am ambitious for the dear child, and I am engaged at this moment in carving out an independent sovereignty for him in case God should take his father from us. Henri II., a poor creature, between ourselves, will be King of France; so be it. Our king will be a French king, and we will leave Madame Diane and Paris

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to his elder brother. But we will take with us, with our Charles, the heart of Paris. The court will be where I am, Monsieur de Montbrion; I shall displace the sun. We shall have great painters like Primaticcio, charming poets like Clement Marot, who is fidgeting about yonder in his corner without speaking, a sure proof that he would like an opportunity to repeat some verses to us. All these people are at heart more vain than selfish, and more thirsty for glory than for money. Not he who has the greatest wealth, but he who will flatter them most freely, will have them on his side. And he who has them will be always great, for they will shed lustre upon any place upon which their rays fall. The Dauphin cares for naught but jousting! Oh, well! let him keep the lances and swords, and we will take the pens and the brushes with us. Never fear, Monsieur de Montbrion, I will never allow myself to be put down by Madame Diane, the queen in expectancy. Let her wait patiently till time and chance give her her kingdom. I shall have made one for myself twice over meanwhile. What say you to the Duchy of Milan? There you will not be very far from your friends at Geneva; for I know that you are not altogether indifferent to the new doctrine blown over from Germany. Hush! we will speak of this again, and I will tell you things that will surprise you. Why has Madame Diane assumed to set herself up as protectress of the Catholics? She protects, I protest; that's the difference between us."

With an imperative gesture and a meaning glance, Madame d'Etampes brought her confidences upon this subject to a close, leaving the governor of Charles d'Orléans sadly bewildered. He was on the point of replying, nevertheless, but found that the duchess had already turned to the Duke of Medina-Sidonia.

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We have said that Ascanio could hear all.

"Well, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur," so Madame d'Etampes began, "does the Emperor finally conclude to pass through France? He can hardly do otherwise, to tell the truth, and a net on land is always preferable to a yawning gulf at sea. His cousin Henry VIII. would have no scruples about kidnapping him, and if he escaped the English he would fall into the hands of the Turk. By land the three Protestant princes would oppose his passage. What can he do? He must either proceed through France, or else — cruel sacrifice! — forego the chastisement of the rebels of Ghent, his dear compatriots. For our great Emperor Charles is a good burgher of Ghent. That is very evident in the slight respect which he has shown on occasion for Royal Majesty. Memories of that sort are what make him so timid and circumspect to-day, Monsieur de Medina. Oh, we understand it all! He fears that the King of France will avenge the prisoner in Spain, and that the prisoner at Paris may pay the balance of the ransom due from the prisoner of the Escurial. O mon Dieu! let his mind be at ease; even if he does not comprehend our chivalrous loyalty, he has heard of it, I trust."

"Most assuredly, Madame la Duchesse," said the ambassador, "we know the loyalty of François I. when left to his own devices, but we fear — "

The duke paused.

"You fear his advisers, do you not?" rejoined the duchess. "Yes, yes! Oh, I know very well that advice from a pretty mouth, advice which should take a clever and satirical form, would never fail of influence upon a king's mind. It is your duty to think of that, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur, and take your precautions accordingly. After all, you must have full powers, or, if not full powers, a little paper signed in blank, wherein a good many

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things can be inserted in a few words. We know how it's done. We have studied diplomacy; indeed, I once asked the king to make me an ambassador, for I believe that I have a decided talent for negotiation. Yes, I am sure that it would be very painful for Charles V. to give up a slice of his empire in order to obtain his release, or to assure his inviolability. On the other hand, Flanders is one of the fairest jewels of his crown; it is the inheritance of his mother, Marie de Bourgogne, and it is hard to renounce the patrimony of one's ancestors with a stroke of the pen, especially when that patrimony is a great duchy, which may well be transformed into a little monarchy. But what am I saying, mon Dieu! I, who have a perfect horror of politics, for it is universally agreed that politics and women do not go well together. To be sure, I let fall a word or two thoughtlessly now and then on affairs of state, but if his Majesty presses me and insists upon my expressing my thoughts more fully, I beg him to spare me such tiresome discussions, and sometimes I run away and leave him alone to dream upon them. You, clever diplomatist that you are, and who know mankind so well, will tell me that these words tossed into the air are just the ones which take root in minds like the king's, and that such words, which are supposed to have been blown away by the wind, almost always have more weight than a long harangue which is not listened to. That may be, Monsieur le Duc de Medina, that may be, but I am only a poor woman, engrossed with ribbons and gewgaws, and you understand all these serious matters a thousand times better than I; but the lion may have need of the ant, the skiff may save the ship. We are here to come to an understanding, Monsieur le Duc, and that 's all we have to do."

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"If you choose, madame," said the ambassador, "it will be very quickly done."

"Who gives to-day receives to-morrow," continued the duchess, evading a direct reply; "my womanly instinct will always lead me to advise François I. to perform great and generous deeds, but instinct often turns its back on reason. We must also think of our interest, of the interest of France, of course. But I have confidence in you, Monsieur de Medina; I will ask your advice, and upon the whole I think that the Emperor will do well to rely upon the king's word.

"Ah! if you were in our interest, madame, he would not hesitate."

"Master Clement Marot," said the duchess, abruptly breaking off the conversation, as if she had not heard the ambassador's last exclamation; "Master Clement Marot, do you not happen to have some flowing madrigal, or some stately sonnet to repeat to us?"

"Madame," said the poet, "sonnets and madrigals are natural flowers beneath your feet, and grow apace in the sunshine of your lovely eyes: half a score of lines have come to my mind simply from looking into them."

"Indeed, master! Very good! we will listen to them. Ah! Messire le Prévôt, welcome; pray forgive me for not seeing you at once. Have you news of your future son-in-law, our friend Comte d'Orbec?"

"Yes, madame," replied D'Estourville, "he writes that he is to hasten his return, and we shall soon see him, I trust."

A half suppressed sigh made Madame d'Etampes start, but she said, without turning toward its author: —

"He will be welcomed by us all. Well, Vicomte de Marmagne," she continued, "have you found the sheath of your dagger?"

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"No, madame; but I am on the trace of it, and I know how and where to find it now."

"Good luck to you then, Monsieur le Vicomte, good luck to you. Are you ready, Master Clement? we are all ears."

"The subject is the duchy of Etampes," said Marot.

A murmur of approval ran through the room, and the poet recited the following lines in an affected voice:—

"Ce plaisant val que l'on nomme Tempé
Dont mainte histoire est encore embellie,
Arrosé d'eau, si doux, si attrempé,
Sachez que plus il n'est en Thessalie;
Jupiter, roi qui les cœurs gagne et lie,
L'a de Thessale en France remué,
Et quelque peu son propre nom mué,
Car pour Tempé veut qu'Etampes s'appelle,
Ainsi lui plait, ainsi l'a situé
Pour y loger de France la plus belle."[1]

Madame d'Etampes clapped her hands and smiled, and all the hands and all the lips applauded after her.

"Faith!" said she, "I see that Jupiter transported Pindarus to France when he transported Tempe."

With that the duchess rose, and all the company followed suit. She was fully justified in deeming herself the veritable queen; and it was a true queenly gesture with which she took leave of her guests, and it was as a queen that all saluted her as they withdrew.

[1] That lovely valley called the Vale of Tempe,
Whose refreshing shade doth many a tale adorn,
Watered by cool and limpid streamlets,
Is no more to be found in Thessaly:
For Jupiter, the king who conquers hearts and binds them,
Has bodily transported it from Thessaly to France,
And in a slight degree has changed its name:
For *Tempe* read *Etampes*; such is his will,
And he hath so ordained, and placed it there,
That there might dwell she who is France's loveliest.

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"Remain," she said in a low voice to Ascanio.

Ascanio obeyed.

But when all the others had left the room, it was no haughty and disdainful queen, but an humble and passionate woman, who turned and confronted the young artist.

Ascanio, born of humble parents, brought up far from the world, in the almost cloister-like twilight of the studio, and an unaccustomed guest in palaces, whither he had accompanied his master only on rare occasions, was already giddy, confused, dazzled by the light and noise and conversation. His mind was attacked by something very like vertigo when he heard Madame d'Etampes speak in such simple terms, or rather so coquettishly, of such grave subjects, and touch lightly in familiar phrase upon the destinies of kings and the dismemberment of kingdoms. The woman, like a very Providence, had in some sort distributed to each one his portion of joy or sorrow; she had with the same hand rattled fetters and let crowns fall. And lo! this sovereign of the loftiest earthly things, proud as Lucifer with her noble flatterers, turned to him not only with the soft glance of the loving woman, but with the suppliant air of the slave who fears. Ascanio had suddenly become the leading character in the play, instead of a simple spectator.

It should be said that the coquettish duchess had skilfully planned and brought about this effect. Ascanio was conscious of the empire which this woman assumed, despite his efforts to combat it, not over his heart, but over his mind; and like the child that he was, he sought to hide his trouble beneath a cold, stern demeanor. It may perhaps be that he had seen his spotless Colombe pass like a ghost between the duchess and himself, — Colombe with her white robe and her luminous brow.

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XVII.

LOVE AS PASSION.

"MADAME," said Ascanio, "you requested me to design a lily, do you remember? You ordered me to bring the design to you as soon as it should be completed. I completed it this morning, and I have it here."

"We have time enough, Ascanio," said the duchess, with a smile, and in a siren's voice. "Sit you down, pray. Well, my bonny invalid, what of your wound?".

"I am entirely recovered, madame."

"So far as your shoulder is concerned; but here?" said the duchess, laying her hand upon the young man's heart, with a graceful gesture, and a world of sentiment in her tone.

"I beg you, madame, to forget all that nonsense; I am very angry with myself for having annoyed your ladyship with it."

"O mon Dieu! what means this air of constraint? What means this clouded brow, and this harsh voice? All those men wearied you, did they not, Ascanio?—and as for myself, I hate and abhor them, but I fear them! Oh how I longed to be alone with you! Did you not see how quickly I dismissed them?"

"You are right, madame; I felt sadly out of place in such a distinguished company. I, a poor artist, who am here simply to show you this lily."

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"Ah! mon Dieu! in a moment, Ascanio," continued the duchess, shaking her head; "you are very cold, and very sober with a friend. The other day you were so expansive and so delightful! Why this change, Ascanio? Doubtless some speech of your master's, who cannot endure me. How could you listen to him, Ascanio? Come, be frank; you have discussed me with him, have you not? and he told you that it was dangerous to trust me; that the friendly feeling I had manifested for you concealed some snare; he told you, did he not, that I detest you?"

"He told me that you loved me, madame," retorted Ascanio, looking earnestly into her face.

Madame d'Etampes was speechless for a moment, in presence of the thoughts which rushed through her mind. She wished without doubt that Ascanio should know her love, but she would have liked time to prepare him for it, and to extinguish gradually, without seeming interested in so doing, his passion for Colombe. Now that the ambuscade she had arranged was discovered, she must fight her battle in the broad daylight, and win the victory openly if at all. She made her decision in a second.

"Well, yes," said she, "I do love you. Is it a crime? Is it a sin even? Can one command one's love or hatred? You should never have known that I love you. For why tell you, when you love another? But that man revealed the whole truth, he laid bare my heart to you, and he did well, Ascanio. Look upon it, and you will see there adoration so deep that you can but be touched by it. And now, Ascanio, you must love me too, mark that."

Anne d'Etampes, a potent, superior nature, disdainful by instinct and ambitious from weariness of her surroundings, had had several lovers hitherto, but not one love.

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She had fascinated the king, Admiral Brion had taken her by surprise, the Comte de Longueval caught her fancy for the moment, but throughout all these intrigues the head had always taken the place of the heart. At last, one day she found this young, true love, tender and deep, which she had so often summoned without avail, and now another woman disputed its possession with her. Ah! so much the worse for that other woman! She could not know what an irresistible passion she had to contend with. All the determination and all the violent impulses of her heart, she, Anne d'Etampes, would make manifest in her affection. That woman did not yet know what a fatal thing it would be to have the Duchesse d'Etampes for her rival, the Duchesse d'Etampes, who desired to have her Ascanio to herself, and whose power was such that she could, with a look, a word, a gesture, crush whatever might come between him and herself. The die was cast, the ambition and the beauty of the king's mistress were thenceforth to serve no other masters than her love for Ascanio and her jealousy of Colombe.

Poor Colombe, at that moment bending over her embroidery, sitting at her spinning-wheel, or kneeling before her prie-Dieu!

Ascanio, in presence of so outspoken and so redoubtable a passion, felt fascinated, carried away, and dismayed, all at the same moment. Benvenuto had said, and Ascanio now realized, that this was no mere whim; but he was deficient, not in the strength to struggle, but in the experience which would have taught him to feign submission. He was hardly twenty years old, and was too candid to pretend; he fancied, poor child, that the memory of Colombe, the name of the innocent girl uttered by him, would be an offensive and defensive

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weapon, a sword and a shield, while on the other hand it was sure to drive the shaft still deeper into the heart of Madame d'Etampes, who perhaps would soon have grown weary of a love in which she had no rival and no battle to wage.

"Come, Ascanio," she resumed more calmly, seeing that the young man held his peace, alarmed perhaps by the words she had let fall, "let us for to-day forget my love, which an imprudent word of yours inopportunely awakened. Let us think now of yourself only. Oh! I love you more on your own account than mine, I swear to you. I long to brighten your life as you have brightened mine. You are an orphan, take me for your mother. You heard what I said to Montbrion and Medina, and you may have thought that I am all ambition. 'T is true, I am ambitious, but for you alone. How long is it since I conceived this project of creating an independent duchy in the heart of Italy for a son of France? Only since I have loved you. If I were queen there, who would be the veritable king? You. For you I would cause empire and kingdom to change places! Ah! Ascanio, you do not know me; you do not know what a woman I am. You see that I tell you the whole truth, I unfold my plans to you without reserve. Now do you, in your turn, confide in me, Ascanio. What are your wishes, that I may fulfil them! What are your passions, that I may minister to them!"

"Madame, I desire to be as frank and loyal as yourself, and to tell you the truth, as you have told it to me. I ask nothing, I wish nothing, I long for nothing, save Colombe's love."

"But she loves you not; you yourself told me so!"

"I was desperate the other day, true. But to-day who can say?" Ascanio lowered his eyes and his voice: "For you love me!" he added.

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The duchess was taken aback by this instance of the instinctive divination of true love. There was a moment of silence, and that moment sufficed for her to collect her thoughts.

"Ascanio, let us not talk to-day of affairs of the heart," she said. "I made that request once before; I make it again. Love is n't the whole of life to you men. For instance, have you never thirsted for wealth, honors, glory?"

"Oh! yes, yes! for a month past I have most ardently longed for them," replied Ascanio, always reverting to the same idea in spite of himself.

Again there was a pause.

"Are you fond of Italy?" Anne resumed with effort.

"Yes, madame," said Ascanio. "There are flowering orange groves there, beneath which it is so pleasant to wander and converse. There the bluest of blue skies surrounds, caresses, and adorns everything that is beautiful."

"Oh, to fly thither with you! — to have you all to myself! — to be all in all to you, as you would be all in all to me! Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" cried the duchess, likewise yielding to the irresistible force of her love. But she at once recovered herself, fearing to frighten Ascanio again, and continued: "I thought that you loved art before everything."

"Before everything I love — to love!" said Ascanio. "Oh! it is my great master Cellini, not I, who throws his whole being into his work. He is the great, the marvellous, the sublime artist! I am a poor apprentice, nothing more. I came to France with him, not to acquire wealth, nor glory, but because I loved him, that 's all, and it was impossible for me to part from him; for at that time he was everything to me. I have no personal will, no strength independent of his strength. I became

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a goldsmith to gratify him, and because he wished it, as I became a carver because of his enthusiasm for skilful and delicate carving."

"Very well," said the duchess, "now listen: to live in Italy, all-powerful, almost a king; to patronize artists, Cellini at their head; to give him bronze, and silver and gold, to carve and cast and mould; and beyond all that, to love and be loved. Say, Ascanio, is it not a lovely dream?"

"It would be Paradise, madame, if it were Colombe whom I loved and who loved me."

"Still Colombe, always Colombe!" cried the duchess. "So be it; since the subject persistently forces itself into our words and our thoughts; since your Colombe is here with us, constantly before your eyes, and constantly in your heart, let us speak of her and of myself frankly and without hypocrisy: she does not love you, and you know it full well."

"Oh, no! I do not know it now, madame."

"But how can she love you when she is to marry another?" cried the duchess.

"Her father forces her, perhaps."

"Her father forces her! And do you think that if you loved me as you loved her, — do you think that if I were in her place there is in this wide world any force or will or power that could keep us apart? Oh, I would leave everything, I would fly from everything, I would run to your arms, and would give you my love, my honor, and my life to guard! No, no! I say she does not love you. And now would you have me tell you something else? you do not love her!"

"What! I not love Colombe! I think you said that I do not love her, madame?"

"No, you do not love her. You deceive yourself. At

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your age, one mistakes the need of loving for love. If you had seen me first, you would love me instead of her. Oh, when I think that you might have loved me! But no, no! it is much better that you should choose me in preference to her. I do not know this Colombe; she is lovely and pure, and whatever you choose; but these slips of girls know nothing about loving. Your Colombe would never have told you what I, whom you despise, have just said; she would have too much vanity, too much diffidence, too much shame perhaps. But my love is simple, and expresses itself in simple words. You despise me, you think that I forget my sex, and all because I don't dissemble. Some day, when you know the world better, when you have drunk so deeply of life that you have reached the dregs, — sorrow, — then you will think better of your present injustice, then you will admire me. But I do not choose to be admired, Ascanio, I choose to be loved. I say again, Ascanio, if I loved you less, I might be false, artful, coquettish; but I love you too well to try to fascinate you. I long to receive your heart as a gift, not to steal it. What will be the end of your love for that child? Tell me. You will suffer, my best beloved, and that's all. But I can serve you in many ways. In the first place, I have suffered for two, and perhaps God will permit my surplusage of suffering to be credited to you; and then I lay my wealth, my power, my experience, all at your feet. I will add my life to yours, and will save you from all sorts of missteps and from all forms of corruption. To arrive at fortune, or even to attain glory, an artist must often stoop to base, crawling expedients. You will be beyond all necessity for that with me. I will lift you ever higher and higher; I will be your stepping-stone. With me you will continue to be the proud, the noble, the pure Ascanio."

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"But Colombe! Colombe, madame! Is not she too an immaculate pearl?"

"My child, believe what I say," replied the duchess, relapsing from feverish exaltation to melancholy. "Your pure white, innocent Columbe will make your life monotonous and dreary. You are both too divine. God did n't make angels to be joined together, but to make bad people better."

The duchess's manner was so eloquent, and her voice so sincere, that Ascanio was conscious of a thrill of affectionate compassion stealing over him, in spite of himself.

"Alas! madame," he said, "I see that I am indeed honored by your affection, and I am very deeply touched; but it is even better to love!"

"Oh, how true! how true that is! I prefer your disdain to the king's softest words. Ah me! I love for the first time: for the first time, I swear!"

"And the king? pray do you not love him, madame?"

"No, I am his mistress, but he is not my master."

"But he loves you!"

"Mon Dieu!" cried Anne, gazing earnestly into Ascanio's face, and seizing both his hands in hers: "Am I so fortunate that you are jealous? Does the king's love offend you? Listen: hitherto I have been in your eyes the duchess, wealthy, noble, powerful, offering to stir up crowned heads and overturn thrones. Do you prefer the poor, lonely woman, out of the world, with a simple white robe, and a wild flower in her hair? Do you prefer that, Ascanio? Let us leave Paris, the court, the world! Let us take refuge in some far off nook in your sunny Italy, beneath the lofty pines of Rome, or on the shores of your lovely Bay of Naples. Here I am: I am ready. O Ascanio, Ascanio, does it really flatter your pride, that I would sacrifice a crowned lover for your sake?"

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"Madame," said Ascanio, whose heart was beginning to melt in the flame of so great a passion, "madame, my heart is too proud and too exacting; you cannot give me the past."

"The past! O you men, you men! always cruel! The past! In God's name ought an unfortunate woman to be compelled to answer for her past, when it has almost always been made what it was by events and circumstances stronger than herself? Suppose that a storm should arise and a whirlwind carry you off to Italy; when you return, one year, two years, three years hence, should you take it ill of your Colombe, whom you love so dearly to-day, because she had obeyed her parents and married Comte d'Orbec? Would you make her virtue a subject of reproach? would you punish her for obeying one of God's commandments? And if she had not your memory to feed upon, if she had never known you, — if, in her deathly ennui, crushed with grief, forgotten for a moment by God, she had sought to gain some knowledge of that paradise called love, the door of which was closed to her, — if she had loved another than her husband, whom she could not love, — if in a moment of delirium she had given her heart in exchange for another, — she would then be ruined in your eyes, dishonored in your heart. She could no longer hope to be blessed by your love, because she had not an unsullied past to give in exchange for your heart. Oh! I repeat, it is unjust, it is cruel!"

"Madame —"

"Who told you that that is not my story? Listen to what I say, and believe what I declare to be the truth. I say again that I have suffered for both; and this poor woman, whom God forgives, you refuse to forgive. You do not understand how much greater and nobler it is to raise one's self from the abyss after falling into it, than

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to pass close by without seeing it, having the bandage of happiness over your eyes. O Ascanio, Ascanio! I deemed you better than the others, because you were younger, and fairer to look upon — "

"O madame!"

"Reach me your hand, Ascanio, and at one bound I will spring from the bottom of the abyss to your heart. Will you? To-morrow I will have broken with the king, the court, the world. Oh, I am valiant in love! But I do not wish to make myself any greater than I am. It would be but a trifling sacrifice for me, believe me. All these men are not worth one glance from you. But, if you would trust to me, dear child, you would let me retain my authority, and continue my plans for you. I would make you great, and you men can do without love if you attain glory: you are ambitious, — you may not know it yet, but you are. As for the king's love, don't be alarmed about that: I will turn it aside upon some other to whom he will give his heart while I retain his mind. Choose, Ascanio. Powerful through my means and with me, or I humble through your means and with you. Look you: a short time since, as you know, I was in this chair, and the most powerful courtiers were at my feet. Sit you in my place: sit you there, and behold me at your feet. Oh, how I love to be here, Ascanio! oh what bliss to see you and look into your eyes! You turn pale, Ascanio! Oh, if you would but tell me that you would love me some day, though not for a long, a very long while!"

"Madame! madame!" cried Ascanio, hiding his face in his hands, and covering eyes and ears, so conscious was he of the potent fascination of the aspect and the accent of the siren.

"Do not call me madame, do not call me Anne," said

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the duchess, putting aside his hands: "call me Louise. It is also my name, but a name by which no one has ever called me, and it shall be yours. Louise! Louise! — Do you not think it a sweet name, Ascanio?"

"I know one sweeter still," replied Ascanio.

"Beware, Ascanio!" cried the wounded lioness: "if you make me suffer too keenly, I may perhaps come to hate you as much as I love you."

"Mon Dieu!" replied the young man, shaking his head, as if to avert the spell: "Mon Dieu! you confuse my thoughts, and overwhelm my heart! Am I delirious? Have I a fever? Am I dreaming? If I say harsh things to you, forgive me, for I do it to awaken myself. I see you, lovely, adored, a queen, here at my feet. It cannot be that such temptations exist except to lead souls to perdition. Ah! you are, as you say, in an abyss; but instead of rising out of it yourself, you would draw me in. Oh, do not expose my weakness to such a trial!"

"There is neither temptation, nor trial, nor dream; there is a resplendent reality for us both: I love you, Ascanio, I love you!"

"You love me, but you will repent of your love hereafter and will reproach me some day for what you have brought into my life, or what I have taken away from yours."

"Ah! you do not know me," cried the duchess, "if you think me weak enough to repent. Stay: will you have a pledge?"

Anne hastily seated herself at a table upon which were writing materials, and, seizing a pen, dashed off a few words.

"Take this," she said, "and doubt me again, if you dare!"

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Ascanio took the paper and read: —

"Ascanio, I love you: go with me where I go, or let me go with you where you go.

"ANNE D'HEILLY."

"Oh, that cannot be, madame! It seems to me that my love would be a cause of shame to you."

"Shame!" cried the duchess: "do I know shame? I am too proud for that. My pride is my virtue!"

"Ah! I know a lovelier and more saintly virtue than that," said Ascanio, clinging to the thought of Colombe with a desperate effort.

The blow struck home. The duchess rose, trembling with indignation.

"You are an obstinate, hard-hearted child, Ascanio," she said in a broken voice: "I would fain have spared you much suffering, but I see that sorrow alone can teach you what life is. You will come back to me, Ascanio; you will return wounded, bleeding, heart-broken, and you will know then the worth of your Colombe and of myself. I will forgive you then, because I love you; but ere that time comes terrible things will happen. *Au revoir.*"

And Madame d'Etampes, wild with love and hatred, left the room, forgetting that the two lines she had written in a moment of exaltation remained in Ascanio's hands.

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XVIII.

LOVE AS A DREAM.

As soon as Ascanio was out of Madame d'Etampes's presence, the fascinating influence which emanated from her disappeared, and he could once more see clearly the condition of his own heart, as well as what was going on about him. Now, he recalled two things he had said. Colombe might love him, since the Duchesse d'Etampes loved him. Thenceforth his life did not belong to him: his instinct had served him well in suggesting these two thoughts to him, but it had led him astray when it inspired him to give utterance to them. If the honest, upright soul of the young man had been capable of descending to dissimulation, all would have been well, but he had simply put the wounded and much to be dreaded duchess on her guard. The struggle henceforth was to be the more terrible, in that Colombe only was threatened.

However, this passionate and perilous scene with the duchess was of service to Ascanio in one respect. He carried away from it a new-born feeling of exaltation and confidence. His mind, excited by the spectacle it had witnessed as well as by its own efforts, was more active than ever, and more inclined to audacious deeds; so that he gallantly determined to find out what basis there might be for his hopes, and to sound the depths of Colombe's heart, though he were to find nothing more

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than indifference there. If Colombe really loved Comte d'Orbec, why contend longer against Madame d'Etampes? She might do what she would with a rebellious, despised, desolate, despairing existence. He would be ambitious, he would become gloomy and evil-minded; what matter if he did? But first of all he must put an end to his doubts, and go with a determined step to meet his fate. If worse came to worst, Madame d'Etampes's promise would take care of the future.

Ascanio arrived at this decision as he returned along the quay, watching the sun sink in a sea of flame behind the black, frowning Tour de Nesle. When he reached the hôtel, without delay or hesitation, he went first to put together a few jewels, then resolutely knocked four times at the door leading to the Petit-Nesle.

Dame Perrine chanced to be in the neighborhood. With astonishment, mingled with curiosity, she made haste to open the gate. But when she saw the apprentice, she felt called upon to assume a very frigid demeanor.

"Ah! is it you, Monsieur Ascanio? What do you wish?"

"I wish to show these jewels to Mademoiselle Colombe immediately, good Dame Perrine. Is she in the garden?"

"Yes, in her path. But wait, young man, wait for me!"

Ascanio, who had not forgotten the road, walked swiftly away without giving another thought to the governess.

"Let us see," said she, stopping to reflect. "I think my best course is not to join them, but to leave Colombe free to select her purchases and her gifts. It would not be becoming for me to be there, if, as is probable, she

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puts something aside for me. I will arrive when she has completed her purchases, and then I should certainly be very ungrateful to refuse. That's what I'll do, stay here and not embarrass the dear, kind-hearted child."

It will be seen that the good woman was not deficient in delicacy.

For ten days past Colombe had not found it necessary to ask herself if Ascanio had become her dearest thought. The pure-souled, unsophisticated child did not know what love was, but her heart was overflowing with love. She told herself that she did wrong to indulge in such dreams, but she excused herself on the ground that she certainly should never see Ascanio again, and that she should not have the consolation of justifying herself in his eyes.

Upon this pretext she passed all her evenings upon the bench where he had sat beside her, and there she would talk to him, listen to him, and concentrate her whole soul upon the memory. And when the darkness came on, and Dame Perrine bade her retire, the lovely dreamer would return to the house with reluctant steps, and not until she was recalled to herself would she remember her father's commands, Comte d'Orbec, and the rapid flight of time. Her sleepless nights were hard to bear, but not sufficiently so to efface the charm of her visions of the evening.

On this evening, as usual, Colombe was living over again the delicious hour she had passed with Ascanio, when, happening to raise her eyes, she uttered a sharp cry.

He was standing before her, gazing at her in silence.

He found her changed, but lovelier than ever. Pallor and melancholy were most becoming to her ideally beautiful face. She seemed to belong still less to earth. And

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so Ascanio, gazing admiringly upon her enhanced charms, was assailed once more by his former modest apprehensions, which Madame d'Etampes's passion had dissipated for a moment. How could this celestial creature ever love him?

The two lovely children, who had loved each other so long without a word, and who had already suffered so much, were at last face to face. They ought, no doubt to have traversed in an instant the space they had traversed step by step, and separately, in their dreams. They might now come to an understanding first of all, and then allow all their long pent-up emotion to find expression in an outburst of joy.

But they were both too timid for that, and although their emotion betrayed each to the other, their angel hearts did not come together until they had first made a detour.

Colombe, speechless and blushing, had risen to her feet by a sudden impulse. Ascanio, pale with the intensity of his emotion, repressed with a trembling hand the rapid beating of his heart.

They both began to speak at once: he to say, "Forgive me, mademoiselle, but you gave me leave to show you some jewels;" she to say, "I am glad to see that you are entirely recovered, Monsieur Ascanio."

They ceased speaking simultaneously, but nevertheless they had perfectly understood each other: and Ascanio, emboldened by the involuntary smile which the incident naturally brought to the maiden's lips, rejoined, with somewhat more assurance: —

"Are you so kind as to remember that I was wounded?"

"Indeed, yes; and Dame Perrine and I have been very anxious and astonished not to see you."

"I did not intend to come again."

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"Why not, pray?"

At this decisive moment Ascanio was fain to lean against a tree for support, but in a moment he summoned all his strength and all his courage, and said breathlessly: —

"I may confess it now: I loved you!"

"And now?"

The question came from Colombe's lips almost without her knowledge: it would have put to flight all the doubts of an older hand than Ascanio, but it simply revived his hopes a little.

"Now, alas!" he continued, "I have measured the distance that lies between us, and I know that you are happily betrothed to a noble count."

"Happily!" interposed Colombe, with a bitter smile.

"What! you do not love the count! Great God! Pray tell me, is he not worthy of you?"

"He is rich and powerful, far above me: but you have seen him?"

"No, and I was afraid to inquire. Besides, I cannot say why, but I felt certain that he was young and attractive, and that he was agreeable to you."

"He is older than my father, and he frightens me," said Colombe, hiding her face in her hands with a gesture of abhorrence which she could not repress.

Ascanio, beside himself with joy, fell on his knees, with clasped hands, pale as death, his eyes half closed, but a sublime light shone out from beneath his eyelids, and a smile fit to rejoice God's heart played about his colorless lips.

"What is the matter, Ascanio?" said Colombe in alarm.

"What is the matter!" cried the young man, finding in the excess of his joy the audacity which sorrow first

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gave him; "What is the matter! why, I love you, Colombe!"

"Ascanio! Ascanio!" murmured Colombe, in a tone that was half reproof, half pleasure, and it must be said, as soft as a confession of love.

But they understood each other; their hearts were united, and before they were conscious of it, their lips had followed suit.

"My friend," said Colombe, softly pushing Ascanio away.

They gazed into one another's faces in ecstasy: the two angels recognized each other at last. Life does not contain two such moments.

"And so," said Ascanio, "you do not love Comte d'Orbec: you are free to love me."

"My friend," said Colombe, in her sweet, grave voice, "no one save my father ever kissed me before, and he, alas! very rarely. I am an ignorant child, and I know nothing of life; but I know from the thrill which your kiss caused me that it is my duty henceforth to belong only to you or to Heaven. Yes, if it were otherwise, I am sure that it would be a crime! Your lips have consecrated me your *fiancée* and your wife, and though my father himself should say no, I would listen only to the voice of God, which says yes in my heart. Here is my hand, which is yours."

"Angels of paradise, hear her and envy me!" cried Ascanio.

Such ecstasy is not to be pictured or described. Let those who can remember, remember. It is impossible to put upon paper the words, the looks, the hand-pressures of these pure-hearted lovely children. Their spotless souls flowed together, as do the waters from two springs, without changing their nature or their color. Ascanio

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did not sully with the shadow of an impure thought the chaste brow of his beloved; Colombe laid her head in perfect trust upon her lover's shoulder. Had the Virgin Mary looked down upon them from on high she would not have turned her head away.

When one begins to love, one is in haste to bring to the support of his love all that he can of his past, present, and future. As soon as they could speak calmly, Ascanio and Colombe described to each other all their sorrows, all their hopes, of the days just gone by. It was charming to both to find that each had the other's story to tell. They had suffered much, and they smiled upon each other as they remembered their suffering.

But when they came to speak of the future, then they became serious and sad. What had God in store for them for the morrow? According to all divine laws they were made for each other; but human prejudices would declare their union ill assorted, monstrous. What were they to do? How persuade Comte d'Orbec to renounce his wife? how persuade the Provost of Paris to give his daughter to an artisan?

"Alas! my friend," said Colombe, "I promised you that I would belong to you or to Heaven, — I see that it must be to Heaven.

"No," said Ascanio, "to me. Two children like ourselves cannot move the world alone; but I will speak to my dear master, Benvenuto Cellini. He is powerful, Colombe, and sees all things from a higher level! He acts on earth as God ordains in heaven, and whatever his will has undertaken he accomplishes. He will give you to me. I do not know how he will do it, but I am sure. He loves obstacles. He will speak to King François; he will persuade your father. The only thing he could not bring to pass you did without his interven-

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tion, — you loved me. The rest ought to be very simple. You see that I believe in miracles now, my best beloved."

"Dear Ascanio, you hope and I hope. Would you like me also to try an experiment? There is a person whose influence over my father's mind is unbounded. Shall I not write to Madame d'Etampes?"

"Madame d'Etampes!" cried Ascanio. "Mon Dieu! I had forgotten her."

Thereupon he told her, simply and without affectation, how he had seen the duchess, how she had declared her love for him, and how, that very day, within an hour, she had pronounced herself the enemy of his beloved. But of what consequence was it? Benvenuto's task would be a little more difficult, that was all. One adversary more would not terrify him.

"My dear," said Colombe, "you have faith in your master, and I have faith in you; speak to Cellini as soon as possible, and let him decide our fate."

"To-morrow I will tell him everything. He loves me so well that he will understand me instantly. But what is it, my Colombe? How sad you are!"

Each sentence of Ascanio's narrative had made Colombe doubly conscious of her love for him by forcing the sharp sting of jealousy into her heart, and more than once she convulsively pressed Ascanio's hand, which she held in her own.

"Ascanio, Madame d'Etampes is very beautiful. She is beloved by a great king. Mon Dieu! did she make no impression upon your heart?"

"I love you!" said Ascanio.

"Wait here for me."

She returned a moment later with a beautiful fresh white lily.

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"When you are working at that woman's lily of gold and jewels," said she, "glance sometimes at the simple lilies from your Colombe's garden."

With that she put her lips to the flower and handed it to the apprentice, as coquettishly as Madame d'Etampes herself could have done.

At that moment Dame Perrine appeared at the end of the path.

"Adieu and *au revoir!*" said Colombe, putting her hand to her lover's lips with a furtive, graceful gesture.

The governess approached them.

"Well, my child," she said to Colombe, "have you given the delinquent a good scolding, and selected your jewels?"

"Take this, Dame Perrine," said Ascanio, putting the box of trinkets in the good woman's hands still unopened; "Mademoiselle Colombe and I have decided that you shall yourself choose whatever suits you best, and I will come again to-morrow for the others."

With that he ran off with his joy, darting a farewell glance at Colombe, which told her all that he had to tell.

Colombe sat with her hands folded upon her breast as if to confine the happiness it contained, while Dame Perrine was making her choice among the marvels brought by Ascanio.

Alas! the poor child was very soon and very cruelly awakened from her sweet dreams.

A woman appeared, escorted by one of the provost's men.

"Monseigneur le Comte d'Orbec, who is to return day after to-morrow," said this woman, "places me at madame's service from to-day. I am familiar with the newest and prettiest styles, and I am commanded by

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Monsieur le Comte and Messire le Prévôt to make for madame a magnificent brocade gown, as Madame la Duchesse d'Etampes is to present madame to the queen on the day of her Majesty's departure for Saint-Germain, four days hence."

After the scene we have described, the reader may imagine the despairing effect of this twofold news upon Colombe.

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XIX.

LOVE AS AN IDEA.

THE next morning at daybreak Ascanio, resolved to place his destiny in his master's hands at once, repaired to the foundry where Cellini worked every morning. But as he was about to knock at the door of what the master called his cell, he heard Scozzone's voice. He supposed that she was posing, and he discreetly withdrew, to return a little later. Meanwhile he walked about the gardens of the Grand-Nesle, reflecting upon what he should say to Cellini, and what Cellini would probably say to him.

But Scozzone was not posing, — far from it. She had never before set foot in the cell, to which no one, to her great disappointment, was ever admitted. So it was that the master's wrath was terrible to behold, when, happening to turn his head, he saw Catherine behind him, with her great eyes open wider than ever. The imprudent damsel's desire to see found little to gratify it, after all. A few drawings upon the walls, a green curtain before the window, a statue of Hebe begun, and a collection of sculptor's utensils, comprised the whole contents of the room.

"What do you want, little serpent? Why have you come here? In God's name will you follow me to hell?" cried Benvenuto at sight of Catherine.

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"Alas! master," said Scozzone, in her softest voice, "I assure you I am not a serpent. I confess that rather than part from you I would joyfully follow you to hell if necessary, and I come here because it is the only place where I can speak to you in secret."

"Very well! make haste! What have you to say to me?"

"O mon Dieu! Benvenuto," exclaimed Scozzone, spying the outlined statue, "what an admirable figure! It is your Hebe. I had no idea it was so far advanced; how lovely it is!"

"Is it not?" said Benvenuto.

"Ah, yes! very lovely, and I understand that you would not want me to pose for such a subject. But who is your model?" inquired Scozzone, anxiously. "I have not seen any woman go in or out."

"Hush! Come, my dear girl, you surely did not come here to talk of sculpture."

"No, master it's about our Pagolo. I did as you bade me, Benvenuto. He took advantage of your absence last evening to annoy me with his eternal love, and, as you commanded, I listened to him to the end."

"Aha! the traitor! What did he say to you?"

"Oh! it's enough to make one die with laughing, and I would have given anything in the world could you have been there. Please understand that, in order not to arouse suspicion, the hypocrite finished the clasp you had given him to make, while he was speaking to me, and the file that he held in his hand added not a little to the pathos of his speech.

"'Dear Catherine,' said he, 'I am dying for love of you; when will you take pity on my martyrdom? One word, I only ask for one word. Just see to what I expose myself for your sake! if I had not finished this

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clasp, the master might suspect something, and if he suspected anything he would kill me without mercy; but I defy everything for your lovely eyes. Jésu! this accursed work does n't advance at all. After all, Catherine, what good does it do you to love Benvenuto? He does n't thank you for it; he is always indifferent to you. And I would love you with a love which would be so ardent and so circumspect at the same time! No one would discover it, you would never be compromised, and you could rely on my discretion, whatever might happen. Look you,' he added, made bold by my silence, 'I have already found a safe retreat, hidden from every eye, where I could take you without fear.' — Ha! ha! you would never guess the place the sly rascal had selected, Benvenuto. I give you a hundred, a thousand guesses; none but men with hang-dog looks, and eyes on the ground discover such out of the way corners. He proposed to quarter me, — where do you suppose? — in the head of your great statue of Mars. 'We can go up,' he said, 'with a ladder.' He assured me that there is a very pretty apartment there, out of every one's sight, and with a magnificent view of the surrounding country."

"Faith, it's not a bad idea," said Benvenuto, with a laugh; "and what reply did you make, Scozzone?"

"I replied with a great burst of laughter, which I could not keep back, and which sorely disappointed Mons. Pagolo. He undertook then to be very pathetic, to reproach me with having no heart, and with wishing to cause his death, and so forth, and so forth. All the time working away with hammer and file, he talked to me in that strain for a full half-hour, for he 's a loquacious rascal when he gives his mind to it."

"What reply did you give him finally, Scozzone?"

"What reply? Just as you knocked at the door, and

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he placed his clasp, finished at last, upon the table, I took his hand, and said to him very soberly, 'Pagolo, you have talked like a jewel!' That was why you found him looking so like an idiot when you came in."

"You were wrong, Scozzone; you should not have discouraged him so."

"You told me to listen to him and I listened. Do you think it's so very easy for me to listen to handsome boys? Suppose something should happen some fine day?"

"You should not only listen to him, my child, but you must give him an answer: it is indispensable to my plan. Speak to him at first without anger, then indulgently, and then encouragingly. When you have reached that point, I will tell you what else you must do."

"But that may have results you do not intend, do you know? At least you should be there."

"Never fear, Scozzone, I will appear at the right moment. You have only to rely upon me, and follow my instructions to the letter. Go now, little one, and leave me to my work."

Catherine tripped lightly away, laughing in pleased anticipation of the fine trick Cellini proposed to play upon Pagolo, of the nature of which, however, she could not form the least conception.

Benvenuto, when she had left him, did not resume his work, as he had said; he rushed to the window which looked obliquely upon the garden of the Petit-Nesle, and stood there in rapt contemplation. A knock at the door rudely aroused him from his reverie.

"Hail and tempest!" he cried in a rage, "who is there now? can I not be left in peace? Ten thousand devils!"

"Forgive me, master," said Ascanio's voice; "if I disturb you, I will go away."

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"What! is it you, my child? No, no, surely not; you never disturb me. What is it, pray? what do you want with me?"

Benvenuto lost no time in opening the door for his beloved pupil.

"I interfere with your solitude and your work," said Ascanio.

"No, Ascanio, you are always welcome."

"Master, I have a secret to confide to you, a service to ask of you."

"Speak. Will you have my purse? do you need my arm or my thoughts?"

"I may have need of them all, dear master."

"So much the better! I am yours body and soul, Ascanio. I have a confession to make to you, too: yes, a confession, for although I have committed no sin, I think, still I shall have some remorse until I am absolved by you. But do you speak first."

"Very well, master. — But, great Heaven! what is that cast?" cried Ascanio, interrupting himself.

His eye had just fallen upon the statue of Hebe, and in the statue he recognized Colombe.

"It is Hebe," replied Benvenuto, with glistening eyes; "it is the goddess of youth. Do you think it beautiful, Ascanio?"

"Oh, wonderful! But those features: I know them, I cannot be mistaken!"

"Rash boy! Since you raise the veil half-way, I must needs snatch it away altogether, and so, after all, your confidence will come after mine. Sit down, Ascanio; you shall have my heart spread out before you like an open book. You need me, you say: I, too, need that you should hear me. I shall be relieved of a great weight when you know all."

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Ascanio sat down, paler than the culprit about to listen to the reading of the death sentence.

"You are a Florentine, Ascanio, and I do not need to ask you if you know the story of Dante Alighieri. One day he saw a child named Beatrice passing along the street, and he loved her. The child died and he loved her still, for it was her soul that he loved and souls do not die; but he crowned her with a crown of stars, and placed her in paradise. That done, he set about analyzing human passions, sounding the depths of poetry and philosophy; and when, purified by suffering and contemplation, he reached the gates of heaven, where Virgil, that is, Wisdom, was to leave him, he was not obliged to stop for lack of a guide, because he found Beatrice, that is, Love, awaiting him on the threshold.

"Ascanio, I have my Beatrice, dead like the other, and adored as she was. This has been hitherto a secret between God and her and myself. I am weak to resist temptation; but my adoration for her has remained intact amid all the impure passions to which I have yielded. I had placed my light too high for corruption to reach it. The man plunged heedlessly into dissipation, the artist remained true to his mysterious betrothal; and if I have done anything creditable, Ascanio,— if inert matter, silver or clay, has been made to assume form and life under my fingers, if I have sometimes succeeded in imparting beauty to marble and life to bronze, — it has been because my resplendent vision has given me counsel, support, and instruction for twenty years past.

"But I know not how it is, Ascanio: perhaps there is a distinction between the poet and the goldsmith, between the moulder of ideas, and the moulder of gold. Dante dreams: I need to see. The name of Maria is all-sufficient to him; I must have before me the face of the

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Madonna. We divine his creations; we touch mine. That perhaps is why my Beatrice was not enough, or rather was too much for me, a sculptor. Her mind was ever present with me, but I was compelled to seek the human form. The angelic woman who shed a bright light upon my life had been beautiful, most certainly, beautiful above all in the qualities of her heart, but she did not realize the type of undying beauty upon which my imagination dwelt. I found myself constrained therefore to seek elsewhere, to invent.

"Now, tell me this, Ascanio; do you think that, if my sculptor's ideal had presented itself to me living on this earth, and if I had bestowed a share of my admiration upon it, I should have been ungrateful and faithless to my poetic ideal? Do you think that my celestial apparition would in that case have ceased to visit me, that the angel would be jealous of the woman? Do you think it? I ask you the question, Ascanio, and you will know some day why I ask it of you rather than of another, — why I tremble as I await your reply, as if you were my Beatrice herself."

"Master," said Ascanio gravely and sadly, "I am too young to have an opinion upon such lofty subjects: I think, however, in my heart, that you are one of the chosen men whom God leads, and that what you find upon your path has been placed there by God, not by chance."

"That is really your belief, is it not, Ascanio? You are of opinion that the terrestrial angel, the realization of my longing, would be sent by God, and that the other celestial angel would not be angry at my desertion? In that case, I may venture to tell you that I have found my ideal, that it is living, that I can see it, and almost touch it. Ascanio, the model of all beauty, of all purity,

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the type of infinite perfection to which we artists aspire, is near at hand, it breathes, and I can admire it every day. Ah! all that I have done hitherto is as nothing compared with what I will do. This Hebe, which you think beautiful, and which is, in very truth, my *chef-d'œuvre*, does not satisfy me as yet: my living dream stands beside its image, and seems to me a hundred times more glorious; but I will attain it! I will attain it! Ascanio, a thousand white statues, all of which resemble it, are already forming and rising in my brain. I see them, I feel their presence, and some day they will come forth.

"And now, Ascanio, would you like me to show you my lovely inspiration? it should be close by us. Every morning, when the sun rises, it shines upon me from below. Look."

Benvenuto drew the curtain aside from the window, and pointed to the garden of the Petit-Nesle.

In her leafy avenue Colombe was walking slowly along, her head resting upon her hand.

"How fair she is, is she not?" said Benvenuto ecstatically. "Phidias and old Michel-Angelo created nothing purer, and the ancients, if they equal, do not surpass that graceful young head. How beautiful she is!"

"Ah! yes, beautiful indeed!" murmured Ascanio, who had resumed his seat, without strength to move or to think.

There was a moment's pause, while Benvenuto feasted upon his joy, and Ascanio brooded over his pain.

"But, master," the apprentice timidly ventured to say, "where will this artist's passion lead you? What do you mean to do?"

"Ascanio," replied Cellini, "she who is dead is not and cannot be mine. God simply showed her to me.

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and did not implant any human love for her in my heart. Strangely enough, he did not even lead me to feel what she was to me until he had taken her from the world. She is naught but a memory in my life, a vague, indistinct image. But if you have understood me, Colombe more nearly touches my existence, my heart: I dare to love her: I dare to say to myself, 'She shall be mine!'

"She is the daughter of the Provost of Paris," said Ascanio, trembling.

"And even if she were a king's daughter, Ascanio, you know what my will is capable of. I have attained whatever object I have sought to attain, and I never longed for aught more ardently. I know not as yet by what means I shall gain my end, but she must be my wife."

"Your wife! Colombe your wife!"

"I will apply to my mighty sovereign," continued Benvenuto. "I will people the Louvre and Chambord with statues if he wishes. I will cover his tables with ewers and candelabra, and when I ask no other price than Colombe he will not be François I. if he refuses. O Ascanio, I am hopeful, I am hopeful! I will seek him in the midst of his whole court. See, three days hence, when he starts for Saint-Germain, you will come with me. We will carry the silver salt-box, which is completed, and the designs for a gateway at Fontainebleau. Every one will admire them, for they are fine, and he will admire them, and will marvel more than the others. I will give him a similar surprise every week. I have never been conscious of a more fruitful creative power. My brain is boiling night and day: this love of mine, Ascanio, has increased my power and renewed my youth. When François sees all his wishes gratified as soon as they are formed, — ah! then I will no longer request, but demand. He will make me great, and I will

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make myself rich, and the Provost of Paris, for all his provostship, will be honored by the alliance. Upon my soul, Ascanio, I am going mad! Such thoughts make me lose control of myself. She mine! Dreams of heaven! Do you realize what it means, Ascanio? Colombe mine! Embrace me, my child; since I have confessed it all to you, I dare to listen to my hopes. My heart is calmer now; you have in a measure legalized my happiness. You will understand some day what I mean by that. Meanwhile, it seems to me that I love you more dearly since you have received my confidence: it was good of you to listen. Embrace me, dear Ascanio!"

"But you do not seem to think, master, that perhaps she does n't love you."

"Oh, hush, Ascanio! I have thought of it, and then I have envied your youth and beauty. But what you say of the far-seeing designs of God reassures me. She is waiting for me to come to her. Whom should she love? some courtier fop, altogether unworthy of her! Furthermore, whoever he may be for whom she is destined, I am as nobly born as he, and I have more genius."

"Comte d'Orbec, they say, is her *fiancé*."

"Comte d'Orbec? so much the better! I know him. He is the king's treasurer, and I go to him for the gold and silver to be used in my work, and for the sums which his Majesty's bounty allots to me. Comte d'Orbec is a crabbed, worn-out old curmudgeon! He does n't count, and there will be little glory in supplanting such an animal. Go to, Ascanio; it is I whom she will love, not for my sake, but for her own, because I shall be the demonstration of her loveliness, so to speak, because she will be appreciated, adored, immortalized. Moreover, I have said, 'I wish it!' and, I say again, I never have

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used that phrase that I have not succeeded. There is no human power which can hold out against the energy of my passion. I shall, as always, go straight to my goal, with the inflexibility of destiny. She shall be mine, I tell you, though I have to turn the whole kingdom topsy-turvy. And if perchance any rival should block my way — Demonio! let him beware! You know me, Ascanio: I will kill him with this hand now grasping thine. But forgive me, Ascanio, in God's name! Egotist that I am, I forget that you have a secret to confide to me, and a service to ask at my hands. I shall never pay my debt to you, dear child, but say on, say on. For you, as well as myself, I can do what it is my will to do."

"You are wrong, master: there are things which God alone can do, and I know that I must rely upon Him and none other. I will leave my secret, therefore, between my feebleness and His might."

Ascanio left the room.

He had hardly closed the door when Cellini drew the green curtain, and, placing his table by the window, began to model his Hebe, his heart filled with joy in the present, and a sense of security for the future.

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ASCANIO

PART SECOND

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'All the workmen joined in a cry of admiration."

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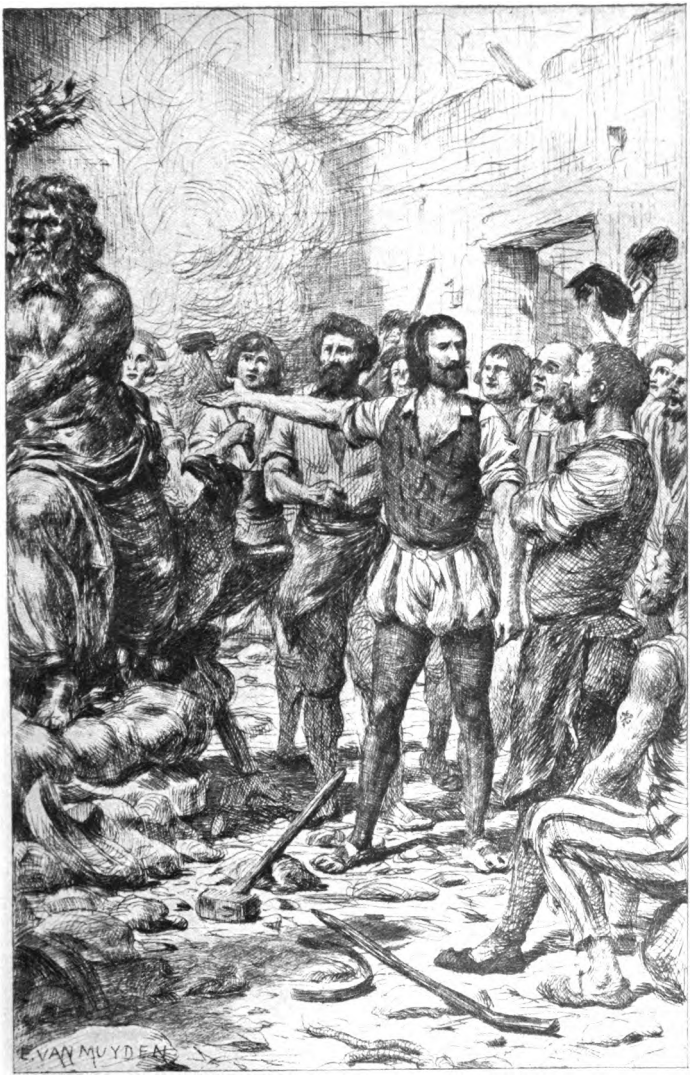

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ASCANIO.

PART SECOND.

I.

THE TRAFFICKER IN HIS OWN HONOR.

It was the day on which Colombe was to be presented to the queen.

The whole court was assembled in one of the state apartments at the Louvre. After hearing mass the court was to depart for Saint-Germain, and they were awaiting the coming of the king and queen to go to the chapel. Except a few ladies who were seated, everybody was moving about from place to place, laughing and talking. There was the rustle of silks and brocades, and the clash of swords; loving and defiant glances were exchanged, together with arrangements for future meetings, of amorous or deadly purport. It was a dazzling, bewildering scene of confusion and splendor; the costumes were superb, and cut in the latest style; among them, adding to the rich and interesting variety, were pages, dressed in the Italian or Spanish fashion, standing like statues, with arms akimbo, and swords at their sides. It was a picture overflowing with animation and magnificence, of which all that we could say would be but a very feeble and

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colorless description. Bring to life all the dandified, laughing cavaliers, all the sportive easy-mannered ladies who figure in the pages of Brantôme and the "Heptameron," put in their mouths the crisp, clever, outspoken, idiomatic, eminently French speech of the sixteenth century, and you will have an idea of this seductive court, especially if you recall the saying of François I.: "A court without women is a year without spring, or a spring without flowers." The court of François I. was a perpetual spring, where the loveliest and noblest of earthly flowers bloomed.

After the first bewilderment caused by the confusion and uproar, it was easy to see that there were two hostile camps in the throng: one, distinguished by lilac favors, was that of Madame d'Etampes; the other, whose colors were blue, hoisted the flag of Diane de Poitiers. Those who secretly adhered to the Reformed religion belonged to the first faction, the unadulterated Catholics to the other. Among the latter could be seen the dull, uninteresting countenance of the Dauphin; the intelligent, winning, blonde features of Charles d'Orléans, the king's second son, flitted here and there through the ranks of the faction of Madame d'Etampes. Conceive these political and religious antipathies to be complicated by the jealousy of women and the rivalry of artists, and the result will be a grand total of hatred, which will sufficiently explain, if you are surprised at them, a myriad of scornful glances and threatening gestures, which all the courtier-like dissembling in the world cannot conceal from the observation of the spectator.

The two deadly enemies, Anne and Diane, were seated at the opposite ends of the room, but, notwithstanding the distance between them, not five seconds

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elapsed before every stinging quip uttered by one of them found its way to the ears of the other, and the retort, forwarded by the same couriers, returned as quickly by the same road.

Amid all these silk and velvet-clad noblemen, in an atmosphere of clever sayings, in his long doctor's robe, stern-featured but indifferent, walked Henri Estienne, devotedly attached to the cause of the Reformation, while not two steps away, and equally oblivious of his surroundings, stood the Florentine refugee, Pietro Strozzi, pale and melancholy, leaning against a pillar, and gazing doubtless in his heart at far-off Italy, whither he was destined to return in chains, there to have no repose save in the tomb. We need not say that the nobly born Italian, a kinsman, through his mother, of Catherine de Medicis, was heart and soul devoted to the Catholic party.

There, too, talking together of momentous affairs of state, and stopping frequently to look each other in the face as if to give more weight to what they were saying, were old Montmorency, to whom the king had given less than two years before the office of Constable, vacant since the fall of Bourbon, and the chancellor, Poyet, bursting with pride over the new tax he had imposed, and the ordinance of Villers-Cotterets, just countersigned by him.[1]

[1] It was at Villers-Cotterets, a small town in the department of Aisne, where François I. had a château, that the famous ordinance was signed, providing that the acts of sovereign courts should no longer be written in Latin, but should be drawn up in the vernacular. This château is still in existence, although sadly shorn of its pristine magnificence, and diverted from the uses for which it was originally intended. Begun by François I., who carved the salamanders upon it, it was finished by Henri II., who added his cipher and that of Catherine de Medicis. The visitor may still see those

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Mingling with none of the various groups, taking part in no conversation, the Benedictine and Cordelier François Rabelais, with a smile which showed his white teeth, watched and listened and sneered, while Triboulet, his Majesty's favorite jester, rolled his humpback and his biting jests around between the legs of the guests, taking advantage of his pygmy-like stature to bite here and there without danger, if not without pain.

Clement Marot, resplendent in a brand-new coat as *valet-de-chambre* to the king, seemed fully as uncomfortable as on the day of his reception at the Hôtel d'Etampes. It was evident that he had in his pocket some poor fatherless sonnet, which he was seeking to dress in the guise of an impromptu conception. But alas! we all know that inspiration comes from on high, and we cannot control it. A ravishing idea had come to his mind unbidden upon the name of Madame Diane. He struggled against it, but the Muse is a mistress, not a lover; the lines formed themselves without his assistance, the rhymes matched themselves to one another as if by some magic power which he could not control. In fine, the wretched verses tormented him more than we can say. He was devoted to Madame d'Etampes beyond question, and to Marguerite de Navarre, — that too, was incontestable, — as was the fact that the Protestant party was the one toward which his sympathies leaned. It may even be that he was in search of an epigram against Madame Diane, when this madrigal in

two letters, master-pieces of the Renaissance, connected, — and note this well, for the spirit of the time is epitomized in this lapidary fact, — connected by a lover's knot, which includes also the crescent of Diane de Poitiers. A charming, but, we must agree, a strange trilogy, which consists of the cipher and arms of the husband, the wife, and the mistress.

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her honor came to his mind; but come it did. And how, we pray to know, when such superb lines were evolved in his brain in laudation of a Catholic, could he forbear, despite his zeal for the Protestant cause, to confide them in a whisper to some appreciative friend of literary tastes?

That is what poor Marot did. But the injudicious Cardinal de Tournon, to whose bosom he intrusted his verses, deemed them so beautiful, so magnificent, that, in spite of himself, he passed them on to M. le Duc de Lorraine, who lost no time in telling Madame Diane of them. Instantly there was a great whispering among the partisans of the blue, in the midst of which Marot was imperatively summoned, and called upon to repeat them. The lilacs, when they saw Marot making his way through the crowd toward Madame Diane, hastened in the same direction, and crowded around the poet, enchanted and terrified at the same time. At last the Duchesse d'Etampes herself left her place, being curious, as she said, to see how "that knave Marot,[1] who had so much wit, would set about praising Madame Diane."

Poor Clement Marot, as he was about to begin, after bowing low to Diane de Poitiers, who smiled upon him, turned his head slightly to glance about and caught the eye of Madame d'Etampes; she also smiled upon him, but the smile of the one was gracious, and of the other awe-inspiring. And so it was with a trembling and uncertain voice that poor Marot, burning up on one side, and frozen on the other, repeated the following verses: —

"Etre Phœbus bien souvent je désire,
Non pour connaître herbes divinement,

[1] *Ce maraud de Marot.*

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Car la douleur que mon cœur veut occire
Ne se guérit par herbe aucunement.
Non pour avoir ma place au firmament,
Non pour son arc encontre Amour laisir,
Car à mon roi ne veux être rebelle.
Etre Phœbus seulement je désir,
Pour être aimé de Diane la belle."[1]

Marot had barely uttered the last syllable of this charming madrigal, when the blues applauded vociferously, while the lilacs preserved a deathly silence. Thereupon, emboldened by the applause on the one hand, and chagrined by the frigid reception accorded his effusion on the other, he boldly presented the *chef-d'œuvre* to Madame de Poitiers.

"To 'Diane the fair,'" he said in an undertone, bowing to the ground before her; "you understand, madame, fair in your own right and by contrast."

Diane thanked him with her sweetest smile, and Marot turned away.

"One may venture to write verses in praise of a fair one, after having done the same in honor of the fairest," said the ill-fated poet apologetically as he passed Madame d'Etampes; "you remember, madame, 'De France la plus belle.'"

Anne replied with a withering glance.

Two groups, composed of acquaintances of the reader,

[1] I often wish that I were Phœbus,
Not for his heaven-born knowledge of herbs,
For the pain which I seek to deaden
Can be cured by no herb that grows.
Nor is it to have my abode in the firmament,
Nor for his bow to contend against Love,
For I do not choose to betray my king.
I long to be Phœbus simply for this,
To be beloved by Diane the fair.

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stood aloof from the throng during this incident. In one were Ascanio and Cellini: Benvenuto was weak enough to prefer the "Divina Commedia" to airy conceits. The other group consisted of Comte d'Orbec, the Vicomte de Marmagne, Messire d'Estourville, and Colombe, who had implored her father not to mingle with the crowd, with which she then came in contact for the first time, and which caused her no other sensation than terror. Comte d'Orbec gallantly refused to leave his *fiancée*, who was to be presented by the provost to the queen after mass.

Ascanio and Colombe, although they were equally bewildered by their strange surroundings, had spied each other at once, and from time to time stealthily exchanged glances. The two pure-hearted, timid children, both of whom had been reared in the solitude which makes noble hearts, would have been isolated and lost indeed in that gorgeous and corrupt throng, had they not been so situated that they could see and thereby mutually strengthen and encourage each other.

They had not met since the day they confessed their love. Half a score of times Ascanio had tried to gain admission to the Petit-Nesle, but always in vain. The new servant, presented to Colombe by Comte d'Orbec, invariably answered his knock instead of Dame Perrine, and dismissed him unceremoniously. Ascanio was neither rich enough nor bold enough to try to buy the woman. Furthermore he had naught but sad news, which she would learn only too soon, to impart to his beloved; the news of the master's avowal of his own passion for Colombe, and the consequent necessity, not only of doing without his support, but perhaps of having to contend against him.

As to the course to be pursued, Ascanio felt, as he

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had said to Cellini, that God alone could now save him. And being left to his own resources he had, in his innocence, resolved to attempt to soften Madame d'Etampes. When a hope upon which one has confidently relied is blasted, one is always tempted to have recourse to the most desperate expedients. The all-powerful energy of Benvenuto not only had failed Ascanio, but would undoubtedly be turned against him. Ascanio determined, therefore, with the trustfulness of youth, to appeal to what he believed he had discovered of grandeur and nobleness and generosity in the character of Madame d'Etampes, in an attempt to arouse the sympathy of her by whom he was beloved with his suffering. Afterward, if that last fragile branch slipped from his hand, what could he do, a poor, weak friendless child, but wait? That was why he had accompanied Benvenuto to court.

The Duchesse d'Etampes had returned to her place. He joined the throng of her courtiers, reached a position behind her, and finally succeeded in making his way to her chair. Chancing to turn her head, she saw him.

"Ah, is it you, Ascanio?" she said, coldly.

"Yes, Madame la Duchesse. I came hither with my master, Benvenuto, and my excuse for venturing to address you is my desire to know if you were hopelessly dissatisfied with the drawing of the lily which you kindly ordered me to prepare, and which I left at the Hôtel d'Etampes the other day."

"No, in very truth, I think it most beautiful," said Madame d'Etampes, somewhat mollified, "and connoisseurs to whom I have shown it, notably Monsieur de Guise here, are entirely of my opinion. But will the completed work be as perfect as the drawing? and if

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you think that you can promise that it will, will my gems be sufficient?"

"Yes, madame, I hope so. I should have liked, however, to place on the heart of the flower a large diamond, which would glisten there like a drop of dew; but it would be too great an expense perhaps to incur for a work intrusted to an humble artist like myself."

"Oh, we can indulge in that extravagance, Ascanio."

"But a diamond of that size would be worth some two hundred thousand crowns, madame."

"Very well, we will reflect thereon. But," added the duchess, lowering her voice, "confer a favor upon me, Ascanio."

"I am at your service, madame."

"A moment since, while listening to Marot's insipid trash, I spied Comte d'Orbec at the other end of the room. Find him out, if you please, and say to him that I would speak with him."

"What, madame!" exclaimed Ascanio, turning pale at the count's name.

"Did you not say that you were at my service?" continued Madame d'Etampes haughtily. "Moreover, my reason for asking you to undertake this commission is that you are interested in the subject of the conversation I wish to have with Comte d'Orbec, and it may well give you food for reflection, if they who are in love do ever reflect."

"I will obey you, madame," said Ascanio, apprehensive lest he should displease her at whose hands he hoped to obtain salvation.

"Very good. Pray address the count in Italian, — I have my reasons for requesting you to do so, — and return to me with him."

Ascanio, to avoid the danger of any further collision

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with his redoubtable foe, walked away, and asked a young nobleman wearing a lilac favor if he had seen Comte d'Orbec, and where he was.

"There he is," was the reply, "that old ape whispering with the Provost of Paris, and standing so near that lovely girl."

The lovely girl was Colombe, at whom all the dandies were gazing with admiring curiosity. The old ape seemed to Ascanio as repulsive a creature as a rival could desire. After scrutinizing him for a moment he walked up to him, and to Colombe's unbounded amazement accosted him in Italian, requesting him to go with himself to Madame d'Etampes. The count excused himself to his *fiancée* and friends, and made haste to obey the duchess's command, followed by Ascanio, who did not take his leave until he had bestowed a significant reassuring glance upon poor Colombe, who was confounded by the extraordinary message, and more than all else by the sight of the messenger.

"Ah, count, good morning," said Madame d'Etampes, as her eye fell upon D'Orbec; "I am charmed to see you, for I have matters of importance to discuss with you. Messieurs," she added, addressing those who were standing near, "we have still a quarter of an hour to await the coming of their Majesties, and if you will allow me I will seize the opportunity to talk with my old friend Comte d'Orbec."

All the noblemen who had crowded about the duchess hastened to stand discreetly aside, in obedience to this unceremonious dismissal, and left her with the king's treasurer in one of the window embrasures, as large as one of our salons of to-day. Ascanio was about to do as the rest did, but, at a sign from the duchess, he remained.

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"Who is this young man?" queried the count.

"An Italian page who does not understand a word of French; you may speak before him exactly as if we were alone."

"Very well, madame," rejoined D'Orbec; "I have obeyed your orders blindly, without even seeking to know your motives. You expressed a wish that my future wife should be presented to the queen to-day. Colombe is here with her father; but, now that I have complied with your command, I confess that I should be glad to understand it. Do I presume too much, madame, in asking you for some little explanation?"

"You are the most devoted of my faithful friends, D'Orbec; happily there is still much that I can do for you, but I do not know if I shall ever be able to pay my debt to you: however, I will try. This treasurership which I have given you is simply the corner stone upon which I propose to build your fortune, count."

"Madame!" said D'Orbec, bowing to the ground.

"I am about to speak frankly to you, therefore; but before all let me offer my congratulations. I saw your Colombe just now: she is truly ravishingly beautiful; a little awkward, but that adds to her charm. And yet, between ourselves, I have racked my brain in vain, — I know you, and I cannot understand with what object you, a serious, prudent man, but slightly enamored, I fancy, of youth and beauty, are entering into this marriage. I say, with what object, for there must necessarily be something underneath it: you are not the man to take such a step at random."

"Dame! one must settle down, madame; and the father is an old villain who has ducats to leave to his daughter."

"But how old is he, pray?"

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"Oh, some fifty-five or six years."

"And you, count?"

"About the same age; but he is so used up."

"I begin to understand, and to recognize your fine hand. I knew that you were above mere vulgar sentiment, and that yonder child's fascinations did not constitute the attraction for you."

"Fie, madame! I have never even thought of them; if she had been ugly it would have been all the same; she happens to be pretty, so much the better."

"Oh, that 's all right, count, otherwise I should despair of you."

"And now that you have found me, madame, will you deign to inform me — "

"Oh, it is simply that I am indulging in some beautiful dreams for you," the duchess interposed. "Where I would like to see you, D'Orbec, do you know, is in Poyet's place, for I detest him," she added, with a malevolent glance at the chancellor, who was still walking with the constable.

"What, madame, one of the most exalted posts in the realm?"

"Well, are you not yourself an eminent man, count? But alas! my power is so precarious; my throne is upon the brink of an abyss. Even at this moment I am in mortal terror. The king has for a mistress the wife of a nobody, a petty judge named Féron. If the woman were ambitious we should be ruined. I ought to have taken the initiative myself in this whim of his Majesty's. Ah! I shall never find another like the little Duchesse de Brissac, whom I presented to him; a sweet woman of no force of character, a mere child. I shall always weep for her; she was not dangerous, and talked to the king of nothing but my perfections. Poor

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Marie! she assumed all the burdens of my position, and left me all the benefits. But this Féronnière, as they call her, why, it requires all my power to draw François I. away from her. I have exhausted my whole arsenal of seductions, and am driven, alas! to my last intrenchment, habit."

"How so, madame?"

"Mon Dieu, yes, I devote myself almost exclusively to his mind now, for his heart is elsewhere; you can understand how much I need an auxiliary. Where can I find her, — a devoted, sincere friend, of whom I can be sure? Ah! I would repay her with such quantities of gold and such a host of honors! Seek out such a one for me, D'Orbec. You know how closely the king and the man are allied in the person of our sovereign, and to what lengths the man can lead the king on. If we could be, not rivals but allies, not mistresses but friends; if, while one held sway over François, the other might hold sway over François I., France would be ours, count, and at what a moment! just as Charles V. is about to plunge into our net of his own free will, when we can hold him to ransom on such terms as we choose, and take advantage of his imprudence to assure ourselves a magnificent future in case of accident. I will explain my plans to you, D'Orbec. This Diane who pleases you so much would no longer threaten our fortunes; and the Chevalier de France might become — But here is the king."

Such was the way of Madame d'Etampes; she rarely expained her meaning, but left it to be guessed. She would sow ideas in a man's mind, and set avarice, ambition, and natural perversity at work; and then she would conveniently interrupt herself. A great and useful art, which cannot be too highly commended to many poets and innumerable lovers.

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So it was that Comte d'Orbec, eager in the pursuit of gain and honors, corrupt to the last degree and worn out by years and dissipation, perfectly understood the duchess, whose eyes more than once during the interview had wandered toward Colombe.

Ascanio's noble and straightforward nature was quite incapable of sounding the depths of this mystery of iniquity and infamy, but he had a vague foreboding that this strange and ominous conversation concealed some terrible peril for his beloved, and he gazed at Madame d'Etampes in terror.

An usher announced the king and queen. In an instant everybody was standing, hat in hand.

"God have you in his keeping, messieurs," said François as he entered the room. "I have some weighty news which I must make known to you at once. Our dear brother, the Emperor Charles V., is at this moment *en route* for France, if he has not already passed the frontier. Let us prepare, messieurs, to welcome him worthily. I need not remind my loyal nobility of the obligations imposed upon us by the laws of hospitality at such a time. We proved at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, that we knew how kings should be received. Within the month Charles V., will be at the Louvre."

"And I, my lords," said Queen Eleanora in her sweet voice, "thank you in advance in my royal brother's name for the welcome you will accord him."

The nobles replied with shouts of "Vive le Roi! Vive la Reine! Vive l'Empereur!"

At that moment something wriggled its way along between the legs of the courtiers toward the king; it was Triboulet.

"Sire," said the fool, "will you permit me to dedicate to your Majesty a work I am about to print?"

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"With all the pleasure in the world, fool," the king replied; "but I must first know the title of the work, and how far advanced it is."

"Sire, the work will be entitled the 'Almanac of Fools,' and will contain a list of the greatest idiots that the world has ever seen. As to the progress I have made with it, I have already inscribed upon the first page the name of the king of all fools past and to come."

"Who might this illustrious worthy be, whom you give me for cousin, and select for king of fools?"

"Charles V., Sire."

"Charles V.," cried the king; "and why Charles V.?"

"Because there is no other than Charles V. in the world, who, after detaining you a prisoner at Madrid as he did, would be insane enough to pass through your Majesty's dominions."

"But suppose that he does pass through the very heart of my dominions without accident?"

"In that case," said Triboulet, "I promise to erase his name and put another in its place."

"Whose name will that be?" queried the king.

"Yours, Sire; for in allowing him to pass you will show yourself a greater fool than he."

The king roared with laughter. The courtiers echoed his merriment. Poor Eleanora alone turned pale.

"Very good!" said François, "put my name in place of the Emperor's at once, for I have given my word of honor, and I'll stand to it. As to the dedication, I accept it, and here is the price of the first copy that appears."

With that the king tossed a well filled purse to Triboulet, who caught it in his teeth, and hopped away on all fours, growling like a dog with a bone.

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"Madame," said the Provost of Paris to the queen, as he stepped forward with Colombe, "will your Majesty permit me to avail myself of this joyful moment to present to you under happy auspices my daughter Colombe, whom you have condescended to receive as one of your maids of honor?"

The kindly queen addressed a few words of congratulation and encouragement to poor abashed Colombe, at whom the king meanwhile was gazing in admiration.

"By my halidome, Messire le Prévôt," said François, smiling, "do you know that it's nothing less than high treason to have kept such a pearl so long buried and out of sight, — a pearl so well adapted to shine in the garland of beauties who surround the majesty of our queen. If you are not punished for the felony, Messire Robert, you may thank the mute intercession of those lovely downcast eyes."

Thereupon the king, with a graceful salutation to the charming girl, passed on to the chapel followed by the whole court.

"Madame," said the Duke of Medina-Sidonia, offering his hand to the Duchesse d'Etampes, "shall we not allow the throng to pass, and remain a little behind? We shall be more conveniently situated here than elsewhere for a word or two of importance which I have to say to you in private."

"I am at your service, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur," replied the duchess. "Do not go, Comte d'Orbec; you may say anything, Monsieur de Medina, before this old friend, who is my second self, and this young man, who speaks nothing but Italian."

"Their discretion is of no less consequence to you than to me, madame, and if you feel sure of them — But we are alone, and I will go straight to the point

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without digression or concealment. You understand that his Sacred Majesty has determined to pass through France, — that he is in all probability already within her boundaries. He is well aware, however, that his path lies between two long lines of enemies, but he relies upon the chivalrous loyalty of the king. You have yourself advised him so to rely, madame, and I frankly admit that, having vastly more power than any titular minister, you have enough influence over François to set a trap for the Emperor, or guarantee his safety, according as your advice is friendly or unfriendly. But why should you turn against us? It is neither for the state's interest nor your own to do so."

"Go on, monseigneur; you have not said all that you have to say, I fancy?"

"No, madame. Charles V. is a worthy successor of Charlemagne, and what a disloyal ally might demand from him as ransom he proposes to bestow as a gift, and to leave neither hospitality nor friendly counsel unrewarded?"

"Superb! he will act with no less discretion than grandeur."

"King François I. has always ardently desired the Duchy of Milan, madame, and Charles will consent to cede that province, a never-ending subject of contention between France and Spain, in consideration of an annual rent charge."

"I understand," said the duchess, "the Emperor's finances are in a straitened condition, as everybody knows; on the other hand, the Milanese is ruined by a score of wars, and his Sacred Majesty would not be sorry to transfer his claim from a poor to an opulent debtor. I refuse, Monsieur de Medina; you must

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yourself understand that such a proposition could not be acceptable."

"But, madame, overtures have already been made to his Majesty on the subject of this investiture, and he seemed delighted with the idea."

"I know it; but I refuse. If you can dispense with my consent, so much the better for you."

"Madame, the Emperor is especially desirous to know that you are in his interest, and whatever you may desire — "

"My influence is not merchandise to be bought and sold, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur."

"O madame, who implied such a thing?"

"Hark ye! you assure me that your master desires my support, and between ourselves he is wise. Very well! to promise it to him I demand less than he offers. Follow me closely. This is what he must do. He must promise François I. the investiture of the Duchy of Milan, but as soon as he has left France behind, he must remember the violated treaty of Madrid, and forget his promise."

"Why, that would mean war, madame!"

"Stay a moment, Monsieur de Medina. His Majesty will cry out and threaten, no doubt. Thereupon Charles will consent to make the Milanese an independent state, and will give it, free of all tribute, to Charles d'Orléans, the king's second son; in that way the Emperor will not aggrandize a rival. That will be worth a few crowns to him, monseigneur, and I think that you can have nothing to say against it. As to any personal desires I may have, as you suggested a moment since, if his Sacred Majesty enters into my plans, he may let fall in my presence, at our first interview, a bauble of more or less brilliancy, which I will pick up,

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if it is worth the trouble, and retain as a souvenir of the glorious alliance concluded between the successor of the Cæsars, King of Spain and the Indies, and myself."

The duchess turned to Ascanio, who was as terrified by her dark and mysterious schemes as the Duke of Medina was disturbed by them, and as Comte d'Orbec seemed delighted.

"All this for you, Ascanio," she whispered. "To win your heart I would sacrifice France. Well, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur," she continued aloud, "what have you to say to that?"

"The Emperor alone can decide upon a matter of such gravity, madame; nevertheless, everything leads me to believe that he will acquiesce in an arrangement which almost terrifies me, it seems so favorable to us."

"If it will set your mind at rest, I will say to you that it is in reality equally favorable to me, and that is why I undertake to make the king accept it. We women have our own political schemes, more profound sometimes than yours. But I can promise you that mine are in no wise inimical to your interests: indeed, how could they be? Meanwhile, however, pending the decision of Charles V., you may be sure that I shall not lose an opportunity to act against him, and that I shall do my utmost to induce his Majesty to detain him as a prisoner."

"What! Madame, is this your way of beginning an alliance?"

"Go to, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur. Can a statesman like yourself fail to see that the most essential thing for me is to put aside all suspicion of undue influence, and that to espouse your cause openly would be the surest method of ruining it? Moreover, I do not propose that

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any one shall ever be able to betray me or denounce me. Let me be your enemy, Monsieur le Duc, and let me talk against you. What does it matter to you? Do you not know what mere words amount to? If Charles V. refuses to accept my terms I will say to the king, 'Sire, trust to my generous womanly instinct. You must not recoil before just and necessary reprisals.' And if the Emperor accepts, I will say, 'Sire, trust to my feminine, that is to say, feline sharpness; you must resign yourself to commit an infamous but advantageous act."

"Ah, madame!" said the Duke of Medina, bowing low, "what a pity it is that you should be a queen, you would have made such a perfect ambassador!"

With that the duke took leave of Madame d'Etampes, and walked away, enchanted with the unexpected turn the negotiations had taken.

"Now it is my purpose to speak plainly and without circumlocution," said the duchess to Comte d'Orbec, when she was alone with Ascanio and him. "You know three things, count: first, that it is most important for my friends and myself that my power should at this moment be put beyond question and beyond the reach of attack; secondly, that when this arrangement is once carried through, we shall have no occasion to dread the future, that Charles d'Orléans will fill the place of François I., and that the Duke of Milan, whom I shall have made what he is, will owe me much more gratitude than the King of France, who has made me what I am; thirdly, that your Colombe's beauty has made a vivid impression upon his Majesty. Very well! I address myself now, count, to the superior individual, who is not influenced by vulgar prejudices. You hold your fate in your own hands at this moment: do you

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choose that Trésorier d'Orbec should succeed Chancelier Poyet, or, in more positive terms, that Colombe d'Orbec should succeed Marie de Brissac?"

Ascanio in his horror made a movement which D'Orbec did not notice, as he met the searching gaze of Madame d'Etampes with a villanous leer.

"I desire to be chancellor," he replied briefly.

"Good! then we are both saved. But what of the provost?"

"Oh," said the count, "you can find some fat office for him; only let it be lucrative rather than honorable, I beg; it will all fall to me when the gouty old rascal dies."

Ascanio could contain himself no longer.

"Madame!" he exclaimed in a voice of thunder, stepping forward.

He had no time to say more, the count had no time to be astonished, for the folding doors were thrown open and the whole court flocked in.

Madame d'Etampes roughly seized Ascanio's hand, and drew him aside with her, as she said in his ear, in a suppressed voice, trembling with passion, —

"Now do you see, young man, how one becomes a king's plaything, and whither life sometimes leads us, in our own despite?"

She said no more. Her words were interrupted by the uproarious good humor and witty sallies of the king and courtiers.

François I. was radiant, for Charles V. was coming. There would be receptions, fêtes, surprises, — a glorious part for him to play. The whole world would have its eyes fixed upon Paris and its king. He looked forward with childish joy to the performance of the drama of which he held all the threads. It was his nature to

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look at everything on the brilliant rather than on the serious side, to aim more at effect than anything else, and to look upon battles as tournaments, and upon royalty as an art. With a mind well stored with strange, poetic, adventurous ideas, François I. made of his reign a theatrical performance, with the world for play-house.

On this day, as he was on the eve of dazzling a rival and Europe, his clemency and benignity were more charming than ever.

As if reassured by his smiling face, Triboulet rolled up to him just as he passed through the door.

"O Sire, Sire!" cried the fool dolefully, "I come to take my leave of you; your Majesty must make up your mind to lose me, and I weep for you more than for myself. What will become of your Majesty without poor Triboulet, whom you love so dearly?"

"What! you are going to leave me, fool, at this moment when there is but one fool for two kings?"

"Yes, Sire, at this moment, when there are two kings for one fool."

"But I do not propose to have it so, Triboulet. I order you to remain."

"In that case pray see that Monsieur de Vieilleville is informed of your royal pleasure, for I but told him what people say of his wife, and for so simple a matter he swore that he would cut off my ears in the first place, and then tear out my soul — if I had one, added the impious villain, whose tongue your Majesty should order to be cut out for such blasphemy."

"La, la!" rejoined the king; "have no fear, my poor fool; the man who should take your life would be very sure to be hanged a quarter of an hour after."

"O Sire, if it makes no difference to you —"

"Well! what?"

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"Have him hanged a quarter of an hour before. I much prefer that."

The whole assemblage roared with laughter, the king above all the others. As he walked on he passed Pietro Strozzi, the noble Florentine exile.

"Signor Pietro Strozzi," he said, "it is a long time, altogether too long, I confess, since you requested letters of naturalization at our hands: it is a disgrace to us that, after having fought so valiantly in Piedmont for the French and like a true Frenchman, you do not yet belong to us, since your country by birth denies you. This evening, Signor Pietro, Messire Le Maçon, my secretary, will take steps to hasten the issuance of your letters of naturalization. Do not thank me: for my honor and your own Charles V. must find you a Frenchman. — Ah! there you are, Cellini, and you never come empty-handed. What have you under your arm, my friend? But stay a moment; it shall not be said, i' faith, that I did not surpass you in munificence. Messire Antoine Le Maçon, you will see that letters of naturalization are issued to my good friend Benvenuto at the same time with the great Pietro Strozzi's, and you will issue them without expense to him; a goldsmith cannot put his hand upon five hundred ducats so readily as a Strozzi."

"Sire," said Benvenuto, "I thank your Majesty, but I pray you to forgive my ignorance; what are these letters of naturalization?"

"What!" exclaimed Antoine Le Maçon, with great gravity, while the king laughed like a madman at the question; "do you not know, Master Benvenuto, that letters of naturalization are the greatest honor his Majesty can bestow upon a foreigner, — that you thereby become a Frenchman?"

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"I begin to understand, Sire, and I thank you again," said Cellini. "But pardon me; as I am already at heart your Majesty's subject, of what use are these letters?"

"Of what use are the letters?" rejoined François, still in the best of humor; "why they are of this use, Benvenuto, that now that you are a Frenchman, I can make you Seigneur du Grand-Nesle, which was not possible before. Messire Le Maçon, you will add to the letters of naturalization the definitive deed of the château. Do you understand now, Benvenuto, of what use the letters of naturalization are?"

"Yes, Sire, and I thank you a thousand times. One would say that our hearts understood each other without words, for this favor which you bestow upon me to-day is a step toward a very, very great favor which I shall perhaps dare to ask at your hands some day, and is, so to say, a part of it."

"You know what I promised you, Benvenuto. Bring me my Jupiter, and ask what you will."

"Yes, your Majesty has a good memory, and I hope your word will prove to be as good. Yes, your Majesty, you have it in your power to gratify a wish, upon which my life in a measure depends, and you have already, by a sublime instinct worthy of a king, made its gratification more easy."

"It shall be done, my eminent artist, according to your wish; but, meanwhile, allow us to see what you have in your hands."

"It is a silver salt-dish, Sire, to go with the ewer and the basin."

"Show it me quickly, Benvenuto."

The king scrutinized, carefully and silently as always, the marvellous piece of work which Cellini handed him.

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"What a blunder!" he said at last; "what a paradox!"

"What! Sire," cried Benvenuto, disappointed beyond measure, "your Majesty is not pleased with it?"

"Certainly not, monsieur. Why, you spoil a lovely idea by executing it in silver! it must be done in gold, Cellini. I am very sorry for you, but you must begin again."

"Alas! Sire," said Benvenuto sadly, "be not so ambitious for my poor works. The richness of the material will destroy these treasures of my thought, I greatly fear. More lasting glory is to be attained by working in clay than in gold, Sire, and the names of us goldsmiths survive us but a little while. Necessity is sometimes a cruel master, Sire, and men are always greedy and stupid. Who can say that a silver cup for which your Majesty would give ten thousand ducats, might not be melted down for ten crowns?"

"How now! do you think that the King of France will ever pawn the dishes from his table?"

"Sire, the Emperor of Constantinople pawned Our Saviour's crown of thorns with the Venetians."

"But a King of France took it out of pawn, monsieur."

"Very true; but think of the possible risks, revolution and exile. I come from a country whence the Medicis have been thrice expelled and thrice recalled, and it is only kings like your Majesty, who are glorious in themselves, from whom their treasures cannot be taken away."

"No matter, Benvenuto, no matter, I desire my salt dish in gold, and my treasurer will hand you to-day a thousand gold crowns of the old weight for that purpose. You hear, Comte d'Orbec, to-day, for I do

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not wish Cellini to lose a minute. Adieu, Benvenuto, go on with your work, the king does not forget his Jupiter; adieu, messieurs, think of Charles V."

While François was descending the staircase to join the queen, who was already in her carriage, and whom he was to accompany on horseback, divers incidents occurred which we must not omit to mention.

Benvenuto walked up to Comte d'Orbec and said to him: "Be good enough to have the gold ready for me, Messire le Trésorier. In obedience to his Majesty's commands I go at once to my house for a bag, and shall be at your office in a half-hour." The count bowed in token of acquiescence, and Cellini took his departure alone, after looking around in vain for Ascanio.

At the same time Marmagne was speaking in an undertone with the provost, who still held Colombe's hand.

"This is a magnificent opportunity," he said, "and I shall go at once and summon my men. Do you tell D'Orbec to detain Cellini as long as possible."

With that he disappeared, and Messire d'Estourville went to D'Orbec and whispered a few words in his ear, after which he said aloud, —

"Meanwhile, count, I will take Colombe back to the Hôtel de Nesle."

"Very good," said D'Orbec, "and come and let me know the result this evening."

They separated, and the provost slowly walked away with his daughter toward the Hôtel de Nesle, followed without their knowledge by Ascanio, who did not lose sight of them, but kept his eyes fixed fondly upon his Colombe.

Meanwhile the king was mounting a superb sorrel, his favorite steed, presented to him by Henry VIII.

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"We are to make a long journey together to-day," he said,

"'Gentil, joli petit cheval,
Bon à monter, doux à descendre.'[1]

Faith, there are the first two lines of a quatrain," he added; "cap them for me, Marot, or you, Master Melin de Saint-Gelais."

Marot scratched his head, but Saint-Gelais anticipated him, and with extraordinary promptness and success continued: —

"Sans que tu sois un Bucéphal,
Tu portes plus grand qu'Alexandre."[2]

He was applauded on all sides, and the king, already in the saddle, waved his hand gracefully in acknowledgment of the poet's swift and happy inspiration.

Marot returned to the apartments of the Queen of Navarre, more out of sorts than ever.

"I don't know what the matter was with them at court to-day," he grumbled, "but they were all extremely stupid."

[1] Dainty, pretty little creature,
Kind to mount, to dismount gentle.

[2] Though thou 'rt not a Bucephalus,
Thou bearest a greater than Alexander.

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II.

FOUR VARIETIES OF BRIGANDS.

BENVENUTO crossed the Seine in all haste, and procured, not a bag as he had told Comte d'Orbec that he should, but a small wicker basket given him by one of his cousins, a nun at Florence. As he was determined to make an end of the affair that day, and it was already two o'clock, he did not wait for Ascanio, whom he had completely lost sight of, nor his workmen, who had gone to dinner; but started at once for Rue Froid-Manteau, where Comte d'Orbec had his official residence; and although he kept his eyes open he saw nothing on the way to cause him the least uneasiness.

When he reached the treasurer's abode that dignitary informed him that he could not deliver his gold to him at once, as there were certain indispensable formalities to be gone through with, a notary to be summoned, and a contract to be drawn up. The count apologized with a thousand expressions of regret, knowing Cellini's impatient nature, and was so courteous withal that it was impossible to be angry; and Benvenuto resigned himself to wait, believing in the reality of these obstacles to a speedy delivery of the gold.

Cellini desired to take advantage of the delay to send for some of his workmen, that they might accompany him home, and help him to carry the gold. D'Orbec quickly volunteered to send one of his servants to the

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Hôtel de Nesle with the message; then he led the conversation around to Cellini's work, and the king's evident partiality for him, — to anything in short likely to incline Benvenuto to be patient, — which was the less difficult of accomplishment as he had no reason for wishing ill to the count, and no suspicion that the count had any reason for being hostile to him. There was his desire to supplant him with Colombe, but no one knew of that desire save Ascanio and himself. He therefore met the treasurer's friendly overtures graciously enough.

Further time was necessary to select gold of the degree of fineness which the king desired him to have. The notary was very slow in coming. A contract is not drawn up in a moment. In short, when, after the final exchange of courtesies, Benvenuto made ready to return to his studio, night was beginning to fall. He questioned the servant who was sent for his companions, and was told that they were unable to come, but that he would gladly carry the gold for him. Benvenuto's suspicions were aroused, and he declined the offer, courteous as it was.

He placed the gold in his little basket, then passed his arm through the two handles, and as there was barely room for his arm, the cover was securely pressed down, and he carried it much more easily than if it had been in a bag. He had a stout coat of mail with sleeves beneath his coat, a short sword at his side, and a dagger in his belt. He set out on his homeward journey at a quick pace, but cautiously nevertheless. Just before he started he noticed several servants speaking together in low tones, and that they left the house in a great hurry, but they made a show of going in a different direction from that taken by him.

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To-day, when one can go from the Louvre to the Institute by the Pont des Arts, Benvenuto's homeward journey would be but a stride, but at that time it was a long walk. He was obliged, starting from Rue Froid-Manteau, to follow the quay as far as the Châtelet, cross the Pont des Meuniers, go across the city by Rue Saint-Barthélemy, cross to the left bank by the Pont Saint-Michel, and from there go down the river to the Grand-Nesle by the deserted quay. The reader need not wonder that, in those days of thieves and cut-throats, Benvenuto, notwithstanding his courage, felt some anxiety touching so considerable a sum as that he carried upon his arm; and if he will go forward with us two or three hundred yards in advance of Benvenuto he will see that his anxiety was not unjustifiable.

When it began to grow dark, about an hour before, four men of forbidding appearance, wrapped in great cloaks, stationed themselves upon the Quai des Augustins, at a point abreast of the church. The river bank was bordered with walls only at that spot, and was absolutely deserted at that moment. While they stood there they saw no one pass but the provost, on his way back to the Châtelet after escorting Colombe to the Petit-Nesle, and him they saluted with the respect due the constituted authorities.

They were talking in low tones in a recess formed by the church, and their hats were pulled well down over their eyes. Two of them are already known to us: the bravos employed by Vicomte de Marmagne in his ill-fated expedition against the Grand-Nesle. Their names were Ferrante and Fracasso. Their companions, who earned their livelihood at the same honorable calling, were named Procope and Maledent. In order that posterity may not quarrel over the nationality of these four

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valiant captains, as it has done for three thousand years over that of old Homer, we will add that Maledent was a Picard, Procope a Bohemian, and that Ferrante and Fracasso first saw the light beneath the soft skies of Italy. As to their distinctive callings in time of peace, Procope was a jurist, Ferrante a pedant, Fracasso a dreamer of dreams, and Maledent a fool. It will be seen that the fact that we are ourselves a Frenchman does not blind us to the character of the only one of these four toilers who happened to be our compatriot.

In battle all four were demons.

Let us listen for a moment to their friendly and edifying conversation. We may be able to judge therefrom what manner of men they were, and what danger was impending over our good friend, Benvenuto.

"At all events, Fracasso," said Ferrante, "we sha'n't be hampered to-day with that great red-faced viscount, and our poor swords can leave their scabbards without his crying, 'Retreat!' — the coward, — and forcing us to turn tail."

"Very true," rejoined Fracasso, "but as he leaves us all the risk of the combat, for which I thank him, he ought to leave us all the profit too. By what right does the red-haired devil reserve five hundred crowns for his own part? I admit that the five hundred that remain make a very pretty prize. A hundred and twenty-five for each of us does us honor, — indeed, when times are hard, I sometimes find it necessary to kill a man for two crowns."

"For two crowns! Holy Virgin!" cried Maledent; "shame! that brings discredit on the profession. Don't say such things when I am with you, for any one who overheard you might confound us with each other, my dear fellow."

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"What would you have, Maledent?" said Fracasso, in a melancholy tone; "life has its crosses, and there are times when one would kill a man for a bit of bread. It seems to me, my good friends, that two hundred and fifty crowns are worth just twice as much as a hundred and twenty-five. Suppose that after we have killed our man we refuse to settle with that great thief of a Marmagne?"

"You forget, brother," rejoined Procope seriously, "that that would be to disregard our agreement, to defraud our patron, and we must be loyal in everything. Let us hand the viscount the five hundred crowns to the last sou, as agreed, that is my advice. But *distinguamus*, let us make a distinction; when he has pocketed them, and when he realizes that we are honorable men, I fail to see why we should n't fall upon him and take them from him."

"Well thought of!" exclaimed Ferrante in a judicial tone. "Procope was always distinguished for uprightness of character conjoined with a vivid imagination."

"Mon Dieu! that is because I have studied law a little," said Procope modestly.

"But," continued Ferrante, with the air of pedantry which was habitual to him, "let us not involve ourselves in too many plans at once. *Recte ad terminum eamus.* Let the viscount sleep in peace; his turn will come. This Florentine goldsmith is the one we have to deal with at the moment; for greater security, it was desired that four of us should set upon him. Strictly speaking one only should have done the deed and pocketed the price, but the concentration of capital is a social plague, and 't is much better that the money be divided among several friends. Let us despatch him swiftly and cleanly. He is no ordinary man, as

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Fracasso and I have learned. Let us resign ourselves, therefore, for greater security, to attack him all four at once. It cannot be long now before he comes. Attention! be cool, quick of foot and eye, and beware of the Italian thrusts he 'll be sure to try on you."

"I know what it is, Ferrante," said Maledent disdainfully, "to receive a sword-cut, whether with the edge or the point. Once on a time I made my way at night into a certain château in the Bourbonnais on business of a personal nature. Being surprised by the dawn before I had fully completed it, I had no choice but to conceal myself until the following night. No place seemed to me so appropriate for that purpose as the arsenal of the château: there were quantities of stands of arms and trophies there, and helmets, cuirasses, armlets and cuisses, shields and targets. I removed the upright upon which one of the suits of armor hung, put myself in its place, and stood there, motionless upon my pedestal, with lowered visor."

"This is very interesting," interposed Ferrante; "go on, Maledent; how can we better employ this period of waiting to perform one exploit, than in listening to tales of other feats of arms. Go on."

"I did not know," continued Maledent, "that that accursed suit of armor was used by the young men of the family to practise fencing upon. But soon two strapping fellows of twenty came in, took down a lance and a sword each, and began to cut and thrust at my casing with all their heart. Well, my friends, you may believe me or not, but under all their blows with lance and sword, I never flinched: I stood there as straight and immovable as if I had really been of wood, and riveted to my base. Fortunately the young rascals were not of the first force. The father arrived

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in due time and urged them to aim at the joints in my armor; but Saint Maledent, my patron, whom I invoked in a whisper, turned their blows aside. At last that devil of a father, in order to show the youngsters how to carry away a visor, took a lance himself, and at the first blow uncovered my pale and terrified face. I thought I was lost."

"Poor fellow!" said Fracasso sadly, "how could it be otherwise."

"Fancy, if you please, that when they saw my colorless face they took me for the ghost of their great-grandfather; and father and sons scuttled away as if the devil was at their heels. Need I say more? I turned my back, and did as much for my own part; and you see I came out of it with a whole skin."

"Very good, but the important thing in our trade, friend Maledent," said Procope, "is not only to receive blows manfully, but to deal them handsomely. It's a fine thing when the victim falls without a sound. In one of my expeditions in Flanders I had to rid one of my customers of four of his intimate friends, who were travelling in company. He proposed at first that I should take three comrades, but I told him that I would undertake it alone, or not at all. It was agreed that I should do as I chose, and that I should have the stipend four times over provided that I delivered four dead bodies. I knew the road they were to take, and I awaited their coming at an inn which they must of necessity pass.

"The inn-keeper had formerly belonged to the fraternity, and had left it for his present occupation, which allowed him to plunder travellers without risk; but he retained some kindly sentiments for his former brethren, so that I had no great difficulty in winning him over to

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my interest in consideration of a tenth of the reward. With that understanding we awaited our four horsemen, who soon appeared around a bend in the road, and alighted in front of the inn, preparatory to filling their stomachs and resting their horses. The landlord said to them that his stable was so small that, unless they went in one at a time, they could hardly move there, and would be in each other's way. The first who entered was so slow about coming out, that the second lost patience and went to see what he was doing. He also was in no hurry to reappear, whereupon the third, weary of waiting, followed the other two. After some little time, as the fourth was expressing his astonishment at their delay, mine host remarked: 'Ah! I see what it is: the stable is so extremely small, that they have gone out through the door at the rear.'

"This explanation encouraged my last man to join his companions and myself, for you will have guessed that I was in the stable. I allowed him, however, the satisfaction of uttering one little cry, to say farewell to the world, as there was no longer any danger.

"In Roman law, Ferrante, would not that be called *trucidatio per divisionem necis?* But, deuce take it!" added Procope, changing his tone, "our man doesn't come. God grant that nothing has happened to him! It will be pitch dark very soon."

"*Suadentque cadentia sidera somnos,*" added Fracasso. "And by the way, my friends, take care that Benvenuto does n't in the dark resort to a trick which I once put in practice myself: it was during my sojourn on the banks of the Rhine. I always loved the banks of the Rhine, the country there is so picturesque and at the same time so melancholy. The Rhine is the river of dreamers. I was dreaming then upon the

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banks of the Rhine, and this was the subject of my dreams.

"A nobleman named Schreckenstein, if my memory serves me, was to be put to death. It was no easy matter, for he never went out without a strong escort. This is the plan upon which I finally resolved.

"I donned a costume like that worn by him, and one dark evening I lay in wait for him and his escort. When I saw them coming through the solitude and darkness, *obscuri sub nocte*, I made a desperate attack upon Schreckenstein, who was walking a little ahead; but I was clever enough to strike off his hat with its waving plumes, and then to change my position so that I was standing where he should have been. Thereupon I stunned him with a violent blow with my sword hilt, and began to shout amid the clashing of swords and the shouts of the others, 'Help! help! death to the brigands!' so that Schreckenstein's men fell furiously upon their master and left him dead upon the spot, while I glided away into the bushes. The worthy nobleman could at least say that he was killed by his friends."

"It was a bold stroke," said Ferrante, "but if I were to cast a backward glance upon my vanished past I could find a still more audacious exploit there. Like you, Fracasso, I had to deal with a chief of partisans, always well mounted and escorted. It was in a forest in the Abruzzi. I stationed myself in an enormous oak tree upon a great branch which stretched out over the road at a point which the personage in question must pass; and there I waited, musing. The sun was rising and its first rays fell in long shafts of pale light down through the moss-grown branches; the morning air was fresh and keen, enlivened by the songs of birds. Suddenly —"

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"Sh!" Procope interrupted him. "I hear footsteps: attention! it's our man."

"Good!" muttered Maledent, glancing furtively about; "all is silent and deserted hereabout; fortune is on our side."

They stood without speaking or moving; their dark, threatening faces could not be distinguished in the gathering gloom, but one might have seen their gleaming eyes, their hands playing nervously with their rapiers, and their attitude of breathless suspense; in the half-darkness they formed a striking dramatic group, which no pencil but Salvator Rosa's could adequately reproduce.

It was in fact Benvenuto coming on at a rapid pace; as we have said, his suspicions were aroused, and with his piercing glance he maintained a constant watch in the darkness. As his eyes were accustomed to the uncertain light he saw the four bandits issue from their ambush when he was still twenty yards away, and had time to throw his cloak over his basket, and draw his sword, before they were upon him. Furthermore, with the self-possession which never abandoned him, he backed against the church wall, and thus faced all of his assailants.

They attacked him savagely. He could not retreat, and it was useless to cry out as the château was five hundred yards away. But Benvenuto was no novice in deeds of arms, and he received the cut-throats with vigor.

His mind remained perfectly clear, and a sudden thought flashed through it as he plied his sword. It was evident that this ambuscade was directed against him, and no other. If therefore he could succeed in throwing them off the track, he was saved. He began

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therefore, as the blows rained down upon him, to joke them upon their pretended mistake.

"What fit has seized you, my fine fellows? Are you mad? What do you expect to make out of an old soldier like me? Is it my cloak that you want? Does my sword tempt you? Stay, stay, you! If you want my good sword, you must earn it! Sang-Dieu! By my soul, for thieves who seem to have served their apprenticeship, your scent is bad, my children."

With that he charged upon them, instead of falling back before them, but only took one or two steps away from the wall, and immediately placed his back against it once more, incessantly slashing and thrusting, taking pains to throw aside his cloak several times, so that, if they had been warned by Comte d'Orbec's servants, whom he had seen leave the house, and who had seen him count the money, they would at least conclude that he had not the gold upon him. Indeed, his assured manner of speaking, and the ease with which he handled his sword with a thousand crowns under his arm, caused the bravos to entertain some doubts.

"Damnation! do you suppose we have made a mistake, Ferrante?" said Fracasso.

"I fear so. The man seemed not so tall to me; or even if it is he, he has n't the gold, and that damned viscount deceived us."

"I have gold!" cried Benvenuto, thrusting and parrying vigorously all the while. "I have no gold save a handful of gilded copper; but if you are ambitious to secure that, my children, you will pay dearer for it than if it were gold belonging to another, I promise you."

"Deuce take him!" said Procope, "he's really a soldier. Could any goldsmith fence so cleverly as he?

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Expend all your wind on him, if you choose, you fellows; I don't fight for glory."

And Procope began to beat a retreat, grumbling to himself, while the attack of the others relaxed in vigor, by reason of their doubts, as well as of his absence. Benvenuto, with no such motive for weakening, seized the opportunity to drive them back, and to start for the château, backing before his assailants, but fighting all the time, and defending himself manfully. The savage boar was luring the hounds with him to his den.

"Come, my brave fellows, come with me," he said "bear me company as far as the entrance to the Pré-aux-Clercs, the Maison Rouge, where my sweetheart, whose father sells wine, is expecting me to-night. The road is n't very safe, so they say, and I should be glad to have an escort."

Upon that pleasantry, Fracasso also abandoned the chase, and went to join Procope.

"We are fools, Ferrante!" said Maledent; "this is n't your Benvenuto."

"Yes, yes, I say it is himself," cried Ferrante, who had at last discovered the basket bulging out with money under Benvenuto's arm, as a too sudden movement disarranged his cloak.

But it was too late: the château was within a hundred feet or less, and Benvenuto was shouting in his powerful voice: "Hôtel de Nesle ! ho ! help ! help !"

Fracasso had barely time to retrace his steps, Procope to hasten up, and Ferrante and Maledent to redouble their efforts; the workmen who were expecting their master, were on the alert. The door of the château was flung open at his first shout, and Hermann the colossus, little Jehan, Simon-le-Gaucher, and Jacques Aubry came running out armed with pikes.

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At that sight the bravos turned and fled.

"Wait, wait, my dear young friends," Benvenuto shouted to the fugitives; "won't you escort me a little farther? O the bunglers! who could n't take from one lone man a thousand golden crowns which tired his arm!"

The brigands had in fact succeeded in inflicting no other injury than a slight scratch upon their opponent's hand, and they made their escape shamefaced, and Fracasso howling with pain. Poor Fracasso at the very last lost his right eye, and was one-eyed for the rest of his days, a circumstance which accentuated the tinge of melancholy which was the most prominent characteristic of his pensive countenance.

"Well, my children," said Benvenuto to his companions, when the footsteps of the bravos had died away in the distance, "we must have some supper after that exploit. Come all and drink to my escape, my dear rescuers. But God help me! I do not see Ascanio among you. Where is Ascanio?"

The reader will remember that Ascanio left the Louvre before his master.

"I know where he is?" said little Jehan.

"Where is he, my boy?" asked Benvenuto.

"Down at the end of the garden, where he has been walking for half an hour; the student and I went there to talk with him, but he begged us to leave him alone."

"Strange!" said Benevenuto. "How did he fail to hear my shout? How is it that he did not hasten to me with the others? Do not wait for me, but sup without me, my children. Ah, there you are, Scozzone!"

"O mon Dieu! what is this they tell me, — that some one tried to murder you, master?"

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"Yes, yes, there was something like that."

"Mon Dieu!" cried Scozzone.

"It was nothing, my dear girl, nothing," said Benvenuto consolingly, for poor Catherine had become as pale as death. "Go now and bring wine, of the best, for these gallant fellows. Take the keys of the cellar from Dame Ruperta, Scozzone, and select it yourself."

"Why, you are not going out again?" said Scozzone.

"No, never fear: I am going to find Ascanio in the garden. I have important matters to discuss with him."

Scozzone and the others returned to the studio, and Benvenuto walked toward the gate leading to the garden.

The moon was just rising, and the master saw Ascanio very plainly; but, instead of walking, the young man was climbing a ladder set against the wall between the gardens of the Grand and Petit-Nesle. When he reached the top, he pulled the ladder up after him, lowered it on the other side, and disappeared.

Benvenuto passed his hand over his eyes like a man who cannot believe what he sees. Forming a sudden resolution, he went straight to the foundry and up into his cell, stepped to the window sill, and leaped to the wall of the Petit-Nesle; from there, with the aid of a stout vine, he dropped noiselessly into Colombe's garden; it had rained in the morning, and the ground was so damp that his footfalls were deadened.

He put his ear to the ground, and questioned the silence for some moments. At last he heard subdued voices in the distance, which guided his steps; he at once rose, and crept cautiously forward, feeling his way, and stopping from moment to moment. Soon the voices became more distinct.

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Benvenuto walked toward them, and at last, when he reached the second path which crossed the garden, he recognized Colombe, or rather divined her presence in the shadow, dressed in white, and sitting beside Ascanio on the bench we already know. They were talking in low tones, but distinctly, and with animation.

Hidden from their observation by a clump of trees, Benvenuto drew near and listened.

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III.

AN AUTUMN NIGHT'S DREAM.

It was a beautiful autumn evening, calm and clear. The moon had driven away almost all the clouds, and the few which remained were scattered here and there over the star-strewn sky. Around the group talking and listening in the garden of the Petit-Nesle, everything was calm and silent, but within their hearts all was sadness and agitation.

"My darling Colombe," said Ascanio, while Benvenuto, standing cold and pale behind him, seemed to be listening with his heart rather than with his ears, "my dearest love, why, alas! did our paths meet? When you know all that I have to tell you of misery and horror, you will curse me for being the bearer of such news."

"Nay, my dear," replied Colombe, "whatever you may have to tell me, I shall bless you, for in my eyes you are as one sent by God. I never heard my mother's voice, but I feel that I should have listened to her as I listen to you. Go on, Ascanio, and if you have terrible things to tell me, your voice will at least comfort me a little."

"Summon all your courage and all your strength," said Ascanio.

Thereupon he told her all that had taken place in his presence between Madame d'Etampes and Comte

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d'Orbec; he described the whole plot, a combination of treason against the kingdom and designs upon the honor of an innocent child; he subjected himself to the agony of explaining the infamous bargain made by the treasurer to that ingenuous soul, aghast at this revelation of wickedness; he must needs to make the maiden, whose heart was so pure that she did not blush at his words, understand the cruel refinements of torture and ignominy which hatred and baffled love suggested to the favorite. All that was perfectly clear to Colombe's mind was that her lover was filled with loathing and dismay, and, like the slender vine which has no other support than the sapling to which it clings, she trembled and shuddered with him.

"My dear," she said, "you must make known this fearful plot against my honor to my father. My father does not suspect our love, he owes you his life, and he will listen to you. Oh, never fear! he will rescue me from the clutches of Comte d'Orbec."

"Alas!" was Ascanio's only reply.

"O my love!" cried Colombe, who understood all the apprehension contained in her lover's exclamation. "Oh! can you suspect my father of complicity in so hateful a design? That would be too wicked, Ascanio. No, my father knows nothing, suspects nothing, I am sure, and although he has never shown me any great affection, he would never with his own hand plunge me into shame and misery."

"Forgive me, Colombe," rejoined Ascanio, "but your father is not accustomed to see misery in increased wealth. A title would conceal the shame, and in his courtier-like pride he would deem you happier as a king's mistress than as an artist's wife. It is my duty to hide nothing from you, Colombe: Comte d'Orbec

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told Madame la Duchesse d'Etampes that he would answer for your father."

"Just God, is it possible!" cried the poor girl. "Was such a thing ever seen, Ascanio, as a father who sold his daughter?"

"Such things are seen in all countries and at all times, my poor angel, and more than ever at this time and in this country. Do not picture to yourself the world as fashioned after the image of your heart, or society as taking pattern by your virtue. Yes, Colombe, the noblest names of France have shamelessly farmed out the youth and beauty of their wives and daughters to the royal lust: it is looked upon as a matter of course at court, and your father, if he cares to take the trouble to justify himself, will not lack illustrious precedents. I beg you to forgive me, my beloved, for bringing your chaste and spotless soul so abruptly in contact with this hideous reality; but I cannot avoid the necessity of showing you the snare that is laid for you."

"Ascanio, Ascanio!" cried Colombe, hiding her face against the young man's shoulder; "my father also turns against me. Oh, simply to repeat it kills me with shame! Where can I fly for shelter? Where but to your arms, Ascanio? Yes, it is for you to save me now. Have you spoken to your master, to Benvenuto, who is so strong and great and kindly, judging by your description of him, and whom I love because you love him?"

"Nay, do not love him, do not love him, Colombe!" cried Ascanio.

"Why not?" whispered the girl.

"Because he loves you, because, instead of the friend upon whom we thought we could rely, he is one enemy

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the more we have to contend against: an enemy, you understand, and the most formidable of all our enemies. Listen."

Thereupon he told her how, as he was on the point of making a confidant of Benvenuto, the goldsmith described to him his ideal love, and added that the favorite sculptor of François I. by virtue of the king's word of honor to which he had never proved false, could obtain whatever he chose to ask after the statue of Jupiter was cast. As we know, the boon that Benvenuto proposed to ask was Colombe's hand.

"O God! we have none to look to for succor but thee," said Colombe, raising her white hands and her lovely eyes to heaven. "All our friends are changed to enemies, every haven of refuge becomes a dangerous reef. Are you certain that we are so utterly abandoned?"

"Only too certain," replied Ascanio. "My master is as dangerous to us as your father, Colombe. Yes," he continued, wringing his hands, "I am almost driven to hate him, Benvenuto, my friend, my master, my protector, my father, my God! And yet I ask you, Colombe, why I should bear him ill will? Because he has fallen under the spell to which every exalted mind that comes in contact with yours must yield; because he loves you as I love you. His crime is my own, after all. But you love me, Colombe, and so I am absolved. What shall we do? For two days I have been asking myself the question, and I do not know whether I begin to detest him, or whether I love him still. He loves you, it is true; but he has loved me so dearly, too, that my poor heart wavers and trembles in its perplexity like a reed shaken in the wind. What will he do? First of all, I shall tell him of Comte

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d'Orbec's designs, and I hope that he will deliver us from them. But after that, when we find ourselves face to face as enemies, when I tell him that his pupil is his rival, Colombe, his will, which is omnipotent as fate, will perhaps be as blind; he will forget Ascanio to think only of Colombe; he will turn his eyes away from the man he once loved, to see only the woman he loves, for I feel myself that between him and you I should not hesitate. I feel that I would remorselessly sacrifice my heart's past for its future, earth for heaven! And why should he act differently? he is a man, and to renounce his love would be more than human. We must therefore, fight it out, but how can I, feeble and alone as I am, resist him. But no matter, Colombe: even if I should come some day to hate him I have loved so long and so well, I tell you now that I would not for all the world subject him to the torture he inflicted upon me the other morning when he declared his love for you."

Meanwhile Benvenuto, standing like a statue behind his tree, felt the drops of icy sweat roll down his forehead, and his hand clutched convulsively at his heart.

"Poor Ascanio! dear heart!" returned Colombe, "you have suffered bitterly already, and have much to suffer still. But let us face the future calmly. Let us not exaggerate our griefs, for the prospect is not altogether desperate. Including God there are three of us to make head against misfortune. You would rather see me Benvenuto's wife than Comte d'Orbec's, would you not? But you would also prefer to see me wedded to the Lord than to Benvenuto? Very well! if I am not yours, I will belong to none but the Lord, be sure of that, Ascanio. Your wife in this world, or your

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betrothed in the other. That is my promise to you, Ascanio, and that promise I will keep: never fear."

"Thanks, thou angel from heaven, thanks!" said Ascanio. "Let us forget the great world around us, and concentrate our lives upon this little thicket where we now are. Colombe, you have n't told me yet that you love me. Alas! it would almost seem that you are mine because you could not dō otherwise."

"Hush! Ascanio, hush! do you not see that I am trying to sanctify my happiness by making it a duty! I love you, Ascanio, I love you!"

Benvenuto could no longer find strength to stand; he fell upon his knees with his head against a tree; his haggard eyes were fixed vacantly on space, while, with his ear turned toward the young people, he listened with feverish intentness.

"Dear Colombe," echoed Ascanio, "I love you, and something tells me that we shall be happy, and that the Lord will not abandon the loveliest of all his angels. Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! in this atmosphere of joy which surrounds me, I forget the circle of grief which I must enter when I leave you."

"We must think of to-morrow," said Colombe: "let us help ourselves, Ascanio, so that God may help us. It would be disloyal, I think, to leave your master Benvenuto in ignorance of our love, for he would perhaps incur great risk in contending against Madame d'Etampes and Comte d'Orbec. It would not be fair: you must tell him everything, Ascanio."

"I will obey you, dearest Colombe, for a word from you, as you must know, is law to me. My heart also tells me that you are right, always right. But it will be a terrible blow for him. Alas! I judge from my own heart. It is possible that his love for me may

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turn to hatred, it is possible that he will turn me out of doors. In that case how can I, a stranger, without friends or shelter, resist such powerful enemies as the Duchesse d'Etampes and the king's treasurer. Who will help me to defeat the plans of that terrible couple? Who will fight on my side in this unequal struggle? Who will hold out a helping hand to me?"

"I!" said a deep, grave voice behind them.

"Benvenuto!" cried the apprentice, without even turning round.

Colombe shrieked and sprang to her feet. Ascanio gazed at his master, wavering between affection and wrath.

"Yes, it is I, Benvenuto Cellini," continued the goldsmith, — "I, whom you do not love, mademoiselle, — I, whom you no longer love, Ascanio, and who come to save you both, nevertheless."

"What do you say?" cried Ascanio.

"I say that you must come and sit down again, here by my side, for we must understand one another. You have no need to tell me aught. I have not lost a word of your conversation. Forgive me for listening after I came upon you by chance, but you understand: it is much better that I should know all. You have said some things very sad and terrible for me to hear; but some kind things too. Ascanio was sometimes right and sometimes wrong. It is very true, Mademoiselle, that I would have disputed you with him. But since you love him, that's the end of it, be happy; he has forbidden you to love me, but I will force you to it by giving you to him."

"Dear master!" cried Ascanio.

"You suffer, monsieur, do you not?" said Colombe, clasping her hands.

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"Ah, thanks, thanks!" said Benvenuto, as his eyes filled with tears, but restraining his feelings with a mighty effort. "You see that I suffer. He would not have noticed it, ungrateful boy! But nothing escapes a woman's eyes. Yes, I will not tell you a falsehood; I do suffer! and why not, since you are lost to me! But at the same time I am happy, because I am able to serve you; you will owe everything to me, and that thought comforts me a little. You were wrong, Ascanio; my Beatrice is jealous, and will brook no rival; you, Ascanio, must finish the statue of Hebe. Adieu, my sweetest dream, — the last!"

Benvenuto spoke with effort, in a broken voice. Colombe leaned gracefully toward him, and put her hand in his.

"Weep, my friend, weep," she said softly.

"Yes, yes," said Cellini, bursting into tears.

He stood for some time without speaking, weeping bitterly, and trembling with emotion from head to foot. His forceful nature gladly sought relief in tears too long held back. Ascanio and Colombe looked on in respectful silence at this exhibition of bitter grief.

"Except on the day when I wounded you, Ascanio, except at the moment when I saw your blood flow, I have not wept for twenty years," he said at last, recovering his self-control; "but it has been a hard blow to me. I was in such agony just now behind those trees that I was tempted for a moment to plunge my dagger in my heart, and end it all. The only thing that held my hand was your need of me, and so you saved my life. All is as it should be, after all. Ascanio has twenty years more of happiness to give you than I have, Colombe. And then he is my child: you will be very happy together, and it will rejoice my father's

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heart. Benvenuto will succeed in triumphing over Benvenuto himself, as well as over his enemies. It is the lot of us creators to suffer, and perhaps each one of my tears will cause some lovely statue to spring up, as each of Dante's tears became a sublime strain. You see, Colombe, I am already returning to my old love, my cherished sculpture: that love will never forsake me. You did well to bid me weep: all the bitterness has been washed from my heart by my tears. I am sad still, but I am kind once more, and I will forget my pain in my efforts to save you."

Ascanio took one of the master's hands, and pressed it warmly in his own. Colombe took the other, and put it to her lips. Benvenuto breathed more heavily than he had yet done. Shaking his head, he said with a smile: —

"Do not make it harder for me, but spare me, my children. It will be better never to speak of this again. Henceforth, Colombe, I will be your friend, nothing more; I will be your father. The rest is all a dream. Now let us talk of the danger which threatens you, and of what we are to do. I overheard you a moment since discussing your plans. Mon Dieu! you are very young, and neither of you has an idea of what life really is. You offer yourselves, in the innocence of your heart, to the cruel blows of destiny, unarmed, and you hope to vanquish malignity, avarice, all the vile passions of which man is capable with your kind hearts and your smiles! Dear fools! I will be strong and cunning and implacable in your stead. I am wonted to it, but you, — God created you for happiness and tranquillity, my lovely cherubs, and I will see to it that you fulfil your destiny.

"Ascanio, anger shall not furrow thy calm brow:

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grief, Colombe, shall not disturb the pure outlines of thy face. I will take you in my arms, soft-eyed, charming pair; I will bear you so through all the mire and misery of life, and will not set you down until you have arrived safe and sound at perfect joy; and then I 'll gaze at you, and be happy in your happiness. But you must have blind confidence in me; I have my own peculiar ways, abrupt and hard to understand, and which may perhaps alarm you a little, Colombe. I conduct myself somewhat after the manner of artillery, and I go straight to my goal, heedless of what I may meet on the road. Yes, I think more of the purity of my intentions, I confess, than of the morality of the means I use. When I set about modelling a beautiful figure I care but little whether the clay soils my fingers. The figure finished, I wash my hands, and that 's the end of it. Do you then, mademoiselle, with your refined and timorous heart, leave me to answer to God for my acts. He and I understand each other. I have a powerful combination to deal with. The count is ambitious, the provost avaricious, and the duchess very subtle. They are each and all very powerful. You are in their power, and in their hands, and two of them have rights over you: it may perhaps be necessary to resort to craft and violence. I shall arrange it, however, so that you and Ascanio will have no part in a contest in every way beneath you. Come, Colombe, are you ready to close your eyes, and allow yourself to be led? When I say, 'Do this,' will you do it? — 'Remain there,' will you remain? — 'Go,' will you go?"

"What does Ascanio say?" asked Colombe.

"Colombe," returned the apprentice, "Benvenuto is great and good: he loves us and forgives the injury we have done him. Let us obey him, I implore you."

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"Command me, master," said Colombe, "and I will obey you as if you were sent by God himself.

"Very well, my child. I have but one thing more to ask you; it will cost you dear, perhaps, but you must make up your mind to it; thereafter your part will be confined to waiting, and allowing circumstances and myself to do our work. In order that both of you may have more perfect faith in me, and that you may confide unhesitatingly in one whose life may not be unspotted, but whose heart has remained pure, I am about to tell you the story of my youth. All stories resemble one another, alas! and sorrow lies at the heart of every one. Ascanio, I propose to tell you how my Beatrice, the angel of whom I have spoken to you, came to be associated with my existence; you shall know who she was, and you will wonder less no doubt at my determination to abandon Colombe to you, when you realize that by that sacrifice I am but beginning to pay to the child the debt I owe the mother. Your mother! a saint in paradise, Ascanio! Beatrice would say blessed; Stefana would say crowned."

"You have always told me, master, that you would tell me your whole story some day."

"Yes, and the moment has come to redeem my promise. You will have even more confidence in me, Colombe, when you know all the reasons I have for loving our Ascanio."

Thereupon Benvenuto took a hand of each of his children in his own, and told them what follows, in his grave, melodious voice, beneath the glimmering stars in the peaceful silence of the night.

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IV.

STEFANA.

"TWENTY years since, I was twenty years old, as you are now, Ascanio, and I was at work with a Florentine goldsmith named Raphael del Moro. He was a good workman and did not lack taste; but he cared more for rest than for work, allowing himself to be inveigled into attending parties with disheartening facility, and, although he had little money, himself leading astray those who were in his studio. Very often I was left alone in the house, singing over some piece of work I had in hand. In those days I sang as Scozzone does. All the sluggards in the city came as a matter of course to Master Raphael for employment, or rather in quest of pleasure, for he had the reputation of being too weak ever to quarrel. One grows rich slowly with such habits as his; so he was always hard up, and soon came to be the most discredited goldsmith in Florence.

"I am wrong. He had a confrère who had even less custom than he, although he was of a noble family. But it was not for irregularity in meeting his obligations that Gismondo Gaddi was cried down, but for his notorious lack of talent and his sordid avarice. As everything intrusted to him left his hands imperfect or spoiled, and not a customer, unless he happened to be a stranger, ventured into his shop, Gismondo undertook to earn his living by usury, and to loan money at enor-

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mous interest to young men desirous of discounting their future prospects. This profession succeeded better than the other, as Gaddi always demanded good security, and went into nothing without reliable guaranties. With that exception, he was, as he himself said, very considerate and long-suffering; he loaned to everybody, compatriots and foreigners, Jews and Christians. He would have loaned to St. Peter upon the keys of paradise, or to Satan upon his estates in hell.

"Need I say that he loaned to my poor Raphael del Moro, who consumed every day his provision for the morrow, but whose sterling integrity never wavered. Their constant connection in business, and the social ostracism to which both were subjected, tended to bring the two goldsmiths together. Del Moro was deeply grateful for his confrère's untiring amiability in the matter of advancing money. Gaddi thoroughly esteemed an honest and accommodating debtor. They were, in a word, the best friends in the world, and Gismondo would not have missed for an empire one of the parties with which Del Moro regaled him.

"Del Moro was a widower, but he had a daughter of sixteen, named Stefana. From a sculptor's point of view Stefana was not beautiful, and yet her appearance was most striking. Beneath her forehead, which was almost too high and not smooth enough for a woman, one could see her brain at work, so to speak. Her great, moist eyes, of a velvety black hue, moved you to respect and deep emotion as they rested upon you. An ivory pallor overspread her face, which was lightened by a melancholy yet charming expression, like the faint sunshine of an autumn morning. I forget a crown of luxurious raven locks, and hands a queen might have envied.

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"Stefana ordinarily stood bending slightly forward, like a lily swayed by the wind. You might at times have taken her for a statue of Melancholy. When she stood erect, when her lovely eyes sparkled, when her nostrils dilated, when her arm was outstretched to emphasize a command, you would have adored her as the Archangel Gabriel. She resembled you, Ascanio, but you have less weakness of resolution and capacity for suffering. The immortality of the soul was never more clearly revealed to my eyes than in that slender, graceful body. Del Moro, who feared his daughter almost as much as he loved her, was accustomed to say that he had consigned to the tomb only the body of his wife, that Stefana was her dead mother's soul.

"I was at this time an adventurous youth, an impulsive giddy-pated creature. I loved liberty before everything. I was bubbling over with life, and I expended my surplus energy in foolish quarrels and foolish love affairs. I worked nevertheless with no less passion than I put into my pleasures, and despite my vagaries I was Raphael's best workman, and the only one in the establishment who earned any money. But what I did well, I did by instinct, almost by chance. I had studied the ancients to good purpose. For whole days I had gazed upon the bas-reliefs and statues of Athens and Rome, making studies with pencil and chisel, and constant contact with these sublime artists of former days gave me purity and precision of outline; but I was simply a successful imitator; I did not create. Still, I say again, I was incontestably and easily the cleverest and most hardworking of Del Moro's comrades. I have since learned that the master's secret wish was that I should marry his daughter.

"But I was thinking little of settling down; i' faith,

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I was enamored of independence, freedom from care, and an outdoor life. I was absent from the workshop whole days at a time. I would return completely overdone with fatigue, and yet in a few hours I would have overtaken and passed Raphael's other workmen. I would fight for a word, fall in love at a glance. A fine husband I should have made!

"Moreover, my feelings when I was with Stefana in no wise resembled those aroused by the pretty girls of Porta del Prato or Borgo Pinti. She almost overawed me; if I had been told that I loved her otherwise than as an elder sister I should have laughed. When I returned from one of my escapades I dared not look Stefana in the face. She was more than stern, she was sad. On the other hand, when fatigue or a praiseworthy zealous impulse had detained me at home, I always sought Stefana's companionship, her sweet face, and her sweet voice; my affection for her had in it something serious and sacred, which I did not at the time fully understand, but which was very pleasant to me. Very often, amid my wildest excesses, the thought of Stefana would pass through my mind, and my companions would ask me why I had suddenly become thoughtful. Sometimes, when I was in the act of drawing my sword or my dagger, I would pronounce her name as it were that of my patron saint, and I noticed that whenever that occurred I retired from the contest unhurt. But this tender feeling for the dear child, innocent, lovely, and affectionate as she was, lay dormant at the bottom of my heart as in a sanctuary.

"For her part, it is certain, that she was as full of indulgence and kindly feeling for me as she was cold and dignified with my slothful comrades. She sometimes came to sit in the studio beside her father, and I

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would sometimes feel her eyes fixed on my face as she bent over my work. I was proud and happy in her preference, although I did not explain my feeling to myself. If one of my comrades indulged in a little vulgar flattery, and informed me that my master's daughter was in love with me, I received his insolence so wrathfully that he never repeated it.

"An accident which befell Stefana proved to me how deeply she had become rooted in my heart.

"One day when she was in the studio looking at a piece of work, she did not take away her little white hand quickly enough, and a bungling workman, who was tipsy, I think, struck the little finger and the finger beside it with his chisel. The poor child shrieked at first, then, as if ashamed of it, smiled to reassure us, but her hand as she held it up was covered with blood. I think I should have killed the fellow had my mind not been concentrated upon her.

"Gismondo Gaddi, who was present, said that he knew a surgeon in the neighborhood, and ran to fetch him. The villanous medicaster dressed the wound, and came every day to see Stefana; but he was so ignorant and careless that gangrene set in. Thereupon the ass pompously declared that, despite his efforts, Stefana's right arm would always be paralyzed.

"Raphael del Moro was in too straitened circumstances to be able to consult another physician; but when I heard the imbecile announce his decision, I refused to abide by it. I hurried to my room, emptied the purse which contained all my savings, and ran off to Giacomo Rastelli of Perouse, the Pope's surgeon, and the most eminent practitioner in all Italy. At my earnest entreaty, and as the sum I offered him was by no means contemptible, he came at once, exclaiming, 'O these

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lovers!' After examining the wound, he announced that he would answer for it that Stefana would be able to use the right arm as well as the other within a fortnight. I longed to embrace the worthy man. He set about dressing the poor maimed fingers, and Stefana was at once relieved. But a day or two later it was necessary to remove the decayed bone.

"She asked me to be present at the operation to give her courage, whereas I was entirely lacking in it myself, and my heart felt very small in my breast. Master Giacomo made use of some great instrument which caused Stefana terrible pain. She could not restrain her groans, which echoed in my heart. My temples were bathed in a cold perspiration.

"At last the torture exceeded my strength; the cruel tool which tortured those poor, delicate fingers tortured me no less. I rose, begging Master Giacomo to suspend the operation, and to wait for me a quarter of an hour.

"I went down to the studio, and there, as if inspired by my good genius, I made an instrument of thin, sharp steel which would cut like a razor. I returned to the surgeon, who with that operated so gently and easily that the dear girl felt almost no pain. In five minutes it was all over, and a fortnight later she gave me the hand to kiss, which, as she said, I had preserved.

"But it would be impossible for me to describe the poignant emotion I passed through when I saw the suffering of my poor Résignée, as I sometimes called her.

"Resignation was, in truth, the natural condition of her mind. Stefana was not happy; her father's improvidence and recklessness distressed her beyond measure; her only consolation was religion; like all unhappy women she was pious. Very often, as I

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entered some church to pray, for I have always loved God, I would spy Stefana in a corner weeping and praying.

"Whenever, as too frequently happened, Master Del Moro's reckless extravagance left her penniless, she would appeal to me with a simple, trustful confidence, which went to my heart. She would say, dear girl, with the simplicity characteristic of noble hearts: 'Benvenuto, I beg you to pass the night at work, to finish that reliquary, or that ewer, for we have no money at all.'

"I soon adopted the habit of submitting to her every piece of work that I completed, and she would point out its imperfections and advise me with extraordinary sagacity. Solitude and sorrow had inspired and elevated her mind more than one would think possible. Her words, which were at once innocent and profound, taught me more than one secret of my art, and often opened new possibilities to my mind.

"I remember one day when I showed her a medal which I was engraving for a cardinal, and which had a representation of the cardinal's head on one side, and on the other Jesus walking on the sea, and holding out his hand to St. Peter, with this legend: '*Quare dubitasti?*' Wherefore didst thou doubt?

"Stefana was well pleased with the portrait, which was a very good likeness, and very well executed. She looked at the reverse in silence for a long while.

"'The face of Our Lord is very beautiful,' she said at last, 'and if it were intended for Apollo or Jupiter I should find nothing to criticise. But Jesus is something more than beautiful; Jesus is divine. The lines of this face are superb in their purity, but where is the soul? I admire the man, but I look in vain for the

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God. Consider, Benvenuto, that you are not an artist simply, but a Christian as well. My heart, you know, has often bled; that is to say, alas! my heart has often doubted; and I, too, have shaken off my depression when I saw Jesus holding out his hand to me, and have heard the sublime words, "Wherefore hast thou doubted?" Ah, Benvenuto, your image of him is less beautiful than he. In his celestial countenance there was the sadness of the afflicted father, and the clemency of the king who pardons. His forehead shone, but his mouth smiled; he was more than great, he was good.'

"'Wait a moment, Stefana,' said I.

"I effaced what I had done, and in a few moments I once more began upon the Savior's face under her eyes.

"'Is that better?' I asked, as I handed it to her.

"'Oh yes!' she replied, with tears in her eyes; 'so our blessed Lord appeared to me when I was heavy-hearted. Yes, I recognize him now by his expression of compassion and majesty. Ah, Benvenuto! I advise you always henceforth to follow this course: before taking the wax in hand, be sure of the thought; you possess the instrument, master the expression; you have the material part, seek the spiritual part; let your fingers never be aught but the servants of your mind.'

"Such was the counsel given me by that child of sixteen, in her sublime good sense. When I was alone I reflected upon what she had said to me, and realized that she was right. Thus did she guide and enlighten my instinct. Having the form in my mind, I sought the idea, and to combine the form and the idea in such wise that they would issue from my hands a perfectly blended whole, as Minerva came forth all armed from the brain of Jupiter.

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"Mon Dieu! how lovely is youth, and how its memories do overpower one! Ascanio, Colombe, this lovely evening we are passing together reminds me of all those I passed by Stefana's side sitting upon a bench outside her father's house. She would gaze up at the sky, and I would gaze at her. It was twenty years ago, but it seems only yesterday; I put out my hand and fancy that I can feel hers, but it is yours, my children; what God does is well done.

"Oh, simply to see her in her white dress was to feel tranquillity steal over my soul! Often when we parted we had not uttered a word, and yet I carried away from those silent interviews all sorts of fine and noble thoughts, which made me better and greater.

"But all this had an end, as all happiness in this world has.

"Raphael del Moro had but little farther to go to reach the lowest depths of destitution. He owed his kind neighbor Gismondo Gaddi two thousand ducats, which he knew not how to pay. The thought drove this honest man to desperation. He wished at least to save his daughter, and intrusted his purpose to give her to me to one of the workmen, doubtless that he might broach the subject to me. But he was one of the idiots whom I had lost my temper with when they threw Stefana's sisterly affection at my head as a reproach. The blockhead did not even allow Raphael to finish.

"'Abandon that scheme, Master Del Moro,' he said; 'the suggestion would not be favorably received, my word for it.'

"The goldsmith was proud: he believed that I despised him on account of his poverty, and he never referred to the subject again.

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"Some time after, Gismondo Gaddi came to demand payment of his debt, and when Raphael asked for more time,

"'Hark ye,' said Gismondo, 'give me your daughter's hand, and I will give you a receipt in full.'

"Del Moro was transported with joy. To be sure Gaddi had the reputation of being a little covetous, a little high-tempered, and a little jealous, but he was rich, and what the poor esteem and envy most, alas! is wealth. When Raphael mentioned this unexpected proposition to his daughter, she made no reply; but that evening, as we left the bench where we had been sitting together, to return to the house, she said to me, 'Benvenuto, Gismondo Gaddi has asked my hand in marriage, and my father has given his consent.'

"With those simple words she left me. I leaped to my feet, and in a sort of frenzy I went out of the city and wandered about over the fields. Throughout the night, now running like a madman, and again lying at full length upon the grass and weeping, a myriad of mad, desperate, frenzied thoughts chased one another through my disordered brain.

"'She, Stefana, the wife of that odious Gismondo!' I said to myself, when I had in some degree recovered my self-control, and was seeking to collect my wits. 'The thought overpowers me and terrifies me as well, and as she would certainly prefer me, she makes a mute appeal to my friendship, to my jealousy. Ah, yes! I am jealous, furiously jealous; but have I the right to be? Gaddi is morose and violent tempered, but let us be just to one another. What woman would be happy with me? Am I not brutal, capricious, restless, forever involved in dangerous quarrels and unholy intrigues? Could I conquer myself? No, never; so long as the

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blood boils in my veins as at present, I shall always have my hand on my dagger, and my foot outside the house.

"'Poor Stefana! I should make her weep and suffer, I should see her lose color and pine away. I should hate myself, and should soon come to hate her as well, as a living reproach. She would die, and I should have her death to answer for. No, I am not made — alas! I feel that I am not — for calm, peaceful family joys; I must have liberty, space, conflict, anything rather than the peace and monotony of happiness. I should break in my grasp that fragile, delicate flower. I should torture that dear, loving heart by my insults, and my own existence, my own heart would be blighted by remorse. But would she be happier with this Gismondo Gaddi? Why should she marry him? We were so happy together. After all, Stefana must know that an artist's instincts and temperament do not easily accommodate themselves to the rigid bonds, the commonplace necessities of family life. I must say farewell to all my dreams of glory, renounce the thought of making my name famous, and abandon art, which thrives on liberty and power. How can one create when held a prisoner at the domestic fireside? Say, O Dante Alighieri! O Michel-Angelo, my master, how you would laugh to see your pupil rocking his children to sleep, and asking his wife's pardon! No, I will be brave in my own behalf, and generous to Stefana: sad and alone I will dream out my dream and fulfil my destiny.'

"You see, my children, that I make myself no better than I am. There was some selfishness in my decision, but there was also much deep and sincere affection for Stefana, and my raving seemed to border closely on common sense.

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"The next morning I returned to the workshop in a reasonably tranquil frame of mind. Stefana also seemed calm, but she was paler than usual. A month passed thus. One evening Stefana said, as we parted, —

"'In a week, Benvenuto, I shall be Gismondo Gaddi's wife.'

"As she did not leave me at once, I had time to look at her. She stood with her hand on her heart, bending beneath her burden of sorrow, and her sweet smile was sad enough to make one weep. She gazed at me with a sorrowful expression, but without the least indication of reproach. It seemed to me as if my angel, ready to leave earth behind, was saying farewell to me. She stood thus, mute and motionless, for a moment, then entered the house.

"I was destined never to see her more in this world.

"This time again I left the city bareheaded and running like a madman; but I did not return the next day, or the next; I kept on until I reached Rome.

"I remained at Rome five years; I laid the foundation of my reputation, I won the friendship of the Pope, I had duels and love affairs and artistic success, but I was not contented, — something was lacking. Amid my engrossing occupations I never passed a day without turning my eyes toward Florence. There was no night when I did not see in my dreams Stefana, pale-faced and sad, standing in the doorway of her father's house, and gazing at me.

"After five years I received a letter from Florence, sealed with black. I read and reread it so many times that I know it now by heart.

"It ran thus: —

"'Benvenuto, I am dying. Benvenuto, I loved you.

"'Listen to the dreams I dreamed. I knew you as

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well as I knew myself. I foresaw the power that is in you, and that will make you great some day. Your genius, which I read upon your broad forehead, in your ardent glance and your passionate gestures, would impose grave duties on her who should bear your name. I was ready to undertake them. Happiness had for me the solemnity of a divine mission. I would not have been your wife, Benvenuto, I would have been your friend, your sister, your mother. Your noble existence belongs to all mankind, I know, and I would have assumed no other right than that of diverting you in your ennui, of uplifting you in your moments of depression. You would have been free, my friend, always and everywhere. Alas! I had long since become accustomed to your lamentable absences from home, to all the exactions of your impulsive nature, to all the whims of your tempest-loving heart. Every powerful temperament has pressing needs. The longer the eagle has soared aloft, the longer he is obliged to rest on earth. But when you had torn yourself free from the feverish dreams of your genius, I would have found once more at the awakening my sublime Benvenuto, whom I love so dearly, and who would have belonged to me alone! I would never have reproached you for the hours of neglect, for they would have contained no insult for me. For my own part, knowing you to be jealous, as is every noble heart, jealous as the God of Holy Writ, I would have remained in seclusion when you were away, in the solitude which I love, awaiting your return and praying for you.

"'Such would my life have been.

"'But when I saw that you abandoned me, I bowed submissively to God's will and yours, closed my eyes, and placed my fate in the hands of duty. My father

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ordered me to enter into a marriage which would save him from dishonor, and I obeyed. My husband has been harsh, stern, pitiless; he has not been content with my docile submission, but demanded a love beyond my power to give, and punished me brutally for my involuntary sadness. I resigned myself to endure everything. I have been, I trust, a pure and dignified spouse, but always very sad at heart, Benvenuto. God has rewarded me, however, even in this world, by giving me a son. My child's kisses have for four years past prevented me from feeling insults, blows, and last of all poverty! for my husband ruined himself trying to gain too much, and he died last month from chagrin at his ruin. May God forgive him as I do!

"'I shall be dead myself within the hour, dead from the effects of my accumulated suffering, and I bequeath my son to you, Benvenuto.

"'Perhaps all is for the best. Who can say if my womanly weakness would have been equal to the task I would have undertaken with you. He, my Ascanio, — he is like me, — will be a stronger and more submissive companion for you; he will love you better, if not more dearly. I am not jealous of him.

"'Do for my child what I would have done for you.

"'Adieu, my friend. I loved you and I love you still, and I tell you without shame or remorse, at the very doors of eternity, for my love was holy. Adieu! be great, and I shall be happy: raise your eyes sometimes to heaven that I may see you.

"'Your STEFANA.'

"Now, Colombe and Ascanio, will you have confidence in me, and are you ready to do what I advise?"

The young people replied with a single exclamation.

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V.

DOMICILIARY VISITS.

On the day following that on which this story was told in the garden of the Petit-Nesle, by the moon's pale light, Benvenuto's studio wore its accustomed aspect. The master was working at the gold salt dish, the material for which he had so valiantly defended against the four bravos, who strove to take it from him, and his life with it. Ascanio was chiselling Madame d'Etampes's lily; Jacques Aubry, reclining lazily on a lounging-chair, was putting question after question to Cellini, who paid no attention to him, and imposed upon the inquisitive student the necessity of framing his own replies. Pagolo was gazing at Catherine, who was busy with some woman's work. Hermann and the others were filing, welding, chiselling, and Scozzone's joyous singing furnished the element of cheerfulness in this tranquil, busy scene.

The Petit-Nesle was by no means so tranquil, for Colombe had disappeared.

There all was excitement and apprehension; they were seeking her everywhere, and calling her name. Dame Perrine was shrieking at the top of her voice, and the provost, who had been sent for in hot haste, was trying to lay hold upon something, in the midst of the good woman's lamentations, which might put him on the track of the absent one, who was in all probability a fugitive.

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"Look you, Dame Perrine; do you say that you last saw her a few moments after I went away last night?" demanded the provost.

"Alas! yes, messire. Jésus Dieu! what a misfortune! The poor, dear child seemed a bit cast down as she went to take off all her beautiful court fixings. She put on a simple white dress — saints in Paradise, have pity on us! — and then she said to me, 'Dame Perrine, it's a lovely evening, and I will go and take a turn or two in my path.' It might have been about seven o'clock. Madame here," added Perrine, pointing to Pulchérie, the woman who had been installed as her assistant or superior, — "Madame here had already gone to her room, doubtless to work at those lovely dresses which she makes so well, and I was at work sewing in the room below. I don't know how long I remained there, — it is possible that after a while my poor tired eyes closed in spite of me, and that I lost myself a moment."

"As usual," interposed Pulchérie sharply.

"At all events," continued Dame Perrine, not deigning to reply to this insidious slander, "about ten o'clock I left my chair and went to the garden to see if Colombe had not forgotten herself. I called and found no one: I supposed then that she had gone to her own room and to bed without disturbing me, as the dear child has done a thousand times. Merciful Heaven! who would have thought — Ah! Messire le Prévôt, I can safely say that she followed no lover, but some ravisher. I reared her in the way — "

"And this morning," the provost broke in impatiently, "this morning?"

"This morning when I found that she didn't come down — Holy Virgin help us!"

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"To the devil with your litanies!" cried Messire d'Estourville. "Say what you have to say simply and without all these jeremiads. This morning?"

"Ah! Monsieur le Prévôt, you can't prevent my weeping until she is found. This morning, messire, being alarmed at not seeing her (she is always so early!) I knocked at her door to wake her, and, as she did not answer, I opened the door. No one. The bed was not even rumpled, messire. With that I called and cried, and lost my head, and you want me not to weep!"

"Dame Perrine," said the provost sternly; "have you admitted any one here during my absence?"

"I admit any one! the idea!" rejoined the governess with every indication of stupefaction, feeling a little conscience-stricken in that regard. "Did n't you forbid me, messire? Since when, pray, have I allowed myself to disobey your orders? Admit some one? Oh yes, of course!"

"This Benvenuto, for instance, who had the assurance to deem my daughter so fair; has he never tried to buy you?"

"Good lack! he would have been more likely to try to fly to the moon. I would have received him prettily, I promise you."

"I am to understand, then, that you have never admitted a man, a young man, to the Petit-Nesle?"

"A young man! Merciful Heaven! a young man! Why not the devil himself?"

"Pray who is the handsome boy," said Pulchérie, "who has knocked at the door at least ten times since I have been here, and in whose face I have shut the door as often?"

"A handsome boy? Your sight must be poor, my dear, unless it was Comte d'Orbec. Ah, bon Dieu!

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I know: you may mean Ascanio. You know Ascanio, Messire? the young fellow who saved your life. Yes, I did give him my shoe-buckles to repair. But he, that apprentice! Wear glasses, my love! May these walls and pavements speak, if they ever saw him here!"

"Enough," interposed the provost severely. "If you have betrayed my confidence, Dame Perrine, I swear that you shall pay me for it! I am going now to this Benvenuto; God knows how the clown will receive me, but go I must."

Contrary to his expectation Benvenuto received the provost with perfect civility. In the face of his cool and easy manner and his good humor, Messire d'Estourville did not dare mention his suspicions. But he said that his daughter, having been unnecessarily alarmed the evening before, had fled in her panic terror like a mad girl; that it was possible that she might have taken refuge in the Grand-Nesle without Benvenuto's knowledge, — or else that she might have fainted somewhere in the grounds as she was passing through. In short, he lied in the most bungling way imaginable.

But Cellini courteously accepted all his fables and all his excuses; indeed, he was so obliging as to appear to notice nothing out of the way. He did more, he sympathized with the provost with all his heart, declaring that he would be happy to assist in restoring his daughter to a father who had always hedged her around with such touching affection. To hear him, one might suppose the fugitive was very much in the wrong, and could not too soon return to so pleasant a home and so loving a parent. Moreover, to prove the sincerity of his interest in Messire d'Estourville's affliction, he

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placed himself at his disposal to assist him in his search in the Grand-Nesle and elsewhere.

The provost, half convinced, and the more deeply affected by these eulogiums, in that he knew in his heart that he did not deserve them, began a careful search of his former property, of which he knew all the ins and outs. There was not a door that he did not open, not a wardrobe nor a chest into which he did not peer, as if by inadvertence. Having inspected every nook and corner of the hotel itself, he went into the garden, and searched the arsenal, foundry, stables and cellar, scrutinizing everything most rigorously. Benvenuto, faithful to his first offer, accompanied him throughout his investigations, and assisted him to the utmost of his ability, offering him all the keys, and calling his attention to this or that corridor or closet which the provost overlooked. He advised him to leave one of his people on guard in each spot as he left it, lest the fugitive should evade him by stealing from place to place.

Having continued his perquisitions for two hours to no purpose, Messire d'Estourville, feeling sure that he had omitted nothing, and overwhelmed by his host's politeness, left the Grand-Nesle, with profuse thanks and apologies to its master.

"Whenever it suits your pleasure to return," said the goldsmith, "and if you desire to renew your investigations here, my house is open to you at all times, as when it was your own. Indeed it is your right, messire; did we not sign a treaty whereby we agreed to live on neighborly terms?"

The provost thanked Benvenuto, and as he knew not how to return his courtesy, he loudly praised, as he went away, the colossal statue of Mars, which the artist was at work upon, as we have said. Benvenuto

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led him around it, and complacently called his attention to its amazing proportions; it was more than sixty feet high and nearly twenty in circumference at its base.

Messire d'Estourville withdrew much dejected. As he had failed to find his daughter in the precincts of the Grand-Nesle, he was convinced that she had found shelter somewhere in the city. But even at that time the city was sufficiently large to make his own task as chief officer of the police an embarrassing one. Then, too, there was this question to be solved. Had she been kidnapped, or had she fled? Was she the victim of some other person's violence, or had she yielded to her own impulse? There was nothing to set at rest his uncertainty upon this point. He hoped that in the first event she would succeed in escaping, and in the second would return of her own volition. He therefore waited with what patience he could muster, none the less questioning Dame Perrine twenty times a day, who passed her time calling upon the saints in paradise, and swearing by all the gods that she had admitted no one; and indeed she was no more suspicious than Messire d'Estourville himself of Ascanio.

That day and the next passed without news. The provost thereupon put all his agents in the field: a thing he had hitherto omitted to do, in order that the unfortunate occurrence, in which his reputation was so deeply interested, might not be noised abroad. To be sure he simply gave them Colombe's description, without giving them her name, and their investigations were made upon an entirely different pretext from the real one. But although he resorted to all his secret sources of information, all their searching was without result.

Surely he had never been an affectionate or gentle father, but if he was not in despair, he was in a bad

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temper, and his pride suffered if his heart did not. He thought indignantly of the fine match which the little fool would perhaps miss by reason of this escapade, and with furious rage of the witticisms and sarcasms with which his misadventure would be greeted at court.

He had to make up his mind at last to confide his woful tale to Comte d'Orbec. Colombe's *fiancé* was grieved by the news, in the same way as a merchant is grieved who learns that part of his cargo has been jettisoned, and not otherwise. He was a philosopher, was the dear count, and promised his worthy friend that, if the affair did not make too much noise, the marriage should come off none the less; and, as he was a man who knew how to strike when the iron was hot, he seized the opportunity to whisper to the provost a few words as to the plans of Madame d'Etampes regarding Colombe.

The provost was dazzled at the honor which might be in store for him: his anger redoubled, and he cursed the ungrateful girl who was ruining her own chances of such a noble destiny. We spare our readers the details of the conversation between the two old courtiers to which this avowal of Comte d'Orbec led; we will say simply that grief and hope were combined therein in a curiously touching way. As misfortune brings men together, the prospective father-in-law and son-in-law parted more closely united than ever, and without making up their minds to renounce the brilliant prospects of which they had caught a glimpse.

They agreed to keep the occurrence secret from everybody; but the Duchesse d'Etampes was too intimate a friend, and too deeply interested as an accomplice, not to be let into their confidence. It was a wise move on their part, for she took the thing much more to heart than the father and husband had done, and, as we know,

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she was better qualified than any other to give the provost information and direct his search.

She knew of Ascanio's love for Colombe, and she had herself forced him, so to speak, to listen to the whole conspiracy. The young man, realizing that a blow was to be aimed at the honor of his beloved, had perhaps resolved upon some desperate act. But Ascanio had himself told her that Colombe did not love him, and not loving him she would be unlikely to lend herself to such a design. Now the Duchesse d'Etampes knew him upon whom her suspicion first fell sufficiently well to be sure that he would never have the courage to defy his mistress's scorn and her resistance; and yet, despite all her reasoning, and although in her eyes all the probabilities pointed to Ascanio's innocence, her jealous instinct told her that Colombe must be sought at the Hôtel de Nesle, and that they must make sure of Ascanio before everything.

But, on the other hand, Madame d'Etampes could not tell her friends the source of that conviction, for she must in that case confess her love for Ascanio, and that, in the imprudence of her passion, she had made known to him all her designs upon Colombe. She simply said to them that she would be very much mistaken if Benvenuto were not the culprit, Ascanio his accomplice, and the Grand-Nesle the place of concealment. To no purpose did the provost argue with her, and swear that he had inspected and searched every corner, she would not yield her point, saying that she had her reasons for the faith that was in her, and she was so obstinate in her opinion that she ended by arousing suspicion in the mind of Messire d'Estourville, who was certain nevertheless that he had made a thorough search.

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"However," said the duchess, "I will send for Ascanio, I will see him and question him myself, never fear."

"O madame! you are too kind," said the provost.

"And you too stupid," muttered the duchess between her teeth. She dismissed them, and set about reflecting upon the method she should adopt to induce the young man to come to her; but before she had decided upon any, Ascanio was announced; it was as if he had anticipated her wish.

He was cold and calm. The gaze with which Madame d'Etampes received him was so piercing that you would have said she wished to read to the very bottom of his heart; but Ascanio did not seem to notice it.

"Madame," said he, as he saluted her, "I have come to show you your lily, which is almost finished; almost nothing is lacking to complete it save the two hundred thousand crown dewdrop you promised to furnish me."

"Very well! and your Colombe?" was the only reply vouchsafed by Madame d'Etampes.

"If you mean Mademoiselle d'Estourville, madame," rejoined Ascanio gravely, "I will beg you on my knees not to pronounce her name again before me. Yes, madame, I most humbly and earnestly implore you that this subject may never be mentioned between us, in pity's name!"

"Aha! spite!" said the duchess, who did not remove her penetrating gaze from Ascanio's face for an instant.

"Whatever the feeling which influences me, madame, and though I were to be disgraced in your eyes, I shall venture to decline hereafter to talk with you upon this subject. I have sworn a solemn oath that everything connected with that memory shall be dead and buried in my heart."

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"Am I mistaken?" thought the duchess; "and has Ascanio no part in this transaction? Can it be that the child has followed some other adorer, voluntarily or perforce, and, although lost to my ambitious schemes, has served the interests of my passion by her flight?"

Having indulged in these reflections beneath her breath, she continued, aloud: —

"Ascanio, you beg me not to speak of her again, but you will at least allow me to speak of yourself. You see that in obedience to your entreaty I do not insist, but who knows if this second subject will not be even more disagreeable to you than the first? Who knows —"

"Forgive me for interrupting you, madame," said the young man, "but your kindness in granting me the favor I ask emboldens me to ask another. Although of noble birth, I am simply a poor, obscure youth, reared in the gloom of a goldsmith's workshop, and from that artistic cloister I am suddenly transported to a brilliant sphere, involved in the destiny of empires, and, weak creature that I am, having powerful noblemen for enemies, and a king for rival. And such a king, madame! François I., one of the most powerful princes in Christendom! I have suddenly found myself elbow to elbow with the most illustrious names of the age. I have loved hopelessly, I have been honored with a love I could not return! And with whose love? Great God! yours, madame, one of the loveliest and noblest women on earth! All this has sown confusion within me and without; it has bewildered and crushed me, madame.

"I am as terrified as a dwarf awaking to find himself among giants: I have n't an idea in its place, not a feeling which I can explain. I feel lost among all these

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terrible animosities, all these implacable passions, all these soaring ambitions. Madame, give me time to breathe, I conjure you; permit the poor shipwrecked wretch to collect his thoughts, the convalescent to recover his strength. Time, I hope, will restore order in my mind and my life. Time, madame, give me time, and in pity's name see in me to-day only the artist who comes to ask if his lily is to your taste."

The duchess stared at Ascanio in doubt and amazement; she had not supposed that this young man, this child, was capable of speaking in this grave, stern, poetic fashion; she felt morally constrained to obey him, and confined her conversation to the lily, praising and advising Ascanio, and promising to do her utmost to send him very soon the large diamond to complete his work. Ascanio thanked her, and took his leave with every mark of gratitude and respect.

"Can that be Ascanio?" said Madame d'Etampes to herself, when he had gone; "he seems ten years older. What gives him this almost imposing gravity? Is it suffering? is it happiness? Is he sincere, in short, or acting under the influence of that accursed Benvenuto? Is he playing a part with the talent of a consummate artist, or is he simply following his own nature?"

Anne was perplexed. The strange vertigo which gradually overpowered all those who contended with Benvenuto Cellini began to steal over her, despite her strength of mind. She set spies upon Ascanio, who followed him on the rare occasions when he left the studio, but that step led to no result. At last she sent for the provost and Comte d'Orbec, and advised them, as another would have ordered, to make a second and unexpected domiciliary visit to the Grand-Nesle.

They followed her advice; but, although surprised at

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his work, Benvenuto received them even more cordially than he received the provost alone on the former occasion. One would have said, so courteous and expansive was he, that their presence implied no suspicions that were insulting to him. He told Comte d'Orbec good-humoredly of the ambush that he fell into as he left his house with his golden burden a few days before, — on the same day, he observed, on which Mademoiselle d'Estourville disappeared. This time as before he offered to accompany his visitors through the château, and to assist the provost in recovering his authority as a father, whose sacred duties he understood so well. He was very happy that he happened to be at home to do honor to his guests, for he was to start that same day within two hours for Romorantin, having been named by François I., in his condescension, as one of the artists who were to go to meet the Emperor.

For events in the world of politics had moved on as rapidly as those of our humble narrative. Charles V., emboldened by his rival's public promise, and by the secret undertaking of Madame d'Etampes, was within a few day's journey of Paris. A deputation had been selected to go out to receive him, and D'Orbec and the provost found Cellini in travelling costume.

"If he leaves Paris with the rest of the escort," D'Orbec whispered to the provost, "in all probability he didn't carry off Colombe, and we have no business here."

"I told you so before we came," retorted the provost.

However, they decided to go through with their perquisition, and set about it with painstaking minuteness. Benvenuto accompanied them at first, but as he saw that their investigations were likely to be very prolonged, he asked their permission to leave them, and return to

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the studio to give some orders to his workmen, as he was to take his leave very soon, and desired to find the preparations for casting his Jupiter finished at his return.

He did in fact return to the studio, and distributed the work among his men, bidding them obey Ascanio as if he were himself. He then said a few words in Italian in Ascanio's ear, bade them all adieu, and prepared to take his departure. A horse all saddled, and held by little Jehan, awaited him in the outer court-yard.

At that moment Scozzone went up to Benvenuto and took him aside.

"Do you know, master," she said with a sober face, "that your departure leaves me in a very difficult position?"

"How so, my child?"

"Pagolo is becoming fonder of me all the time."

"Ah! is it so?"

"And he is forever talking to me about his love."

"What do you reply?"

"Dame! as you bade me, master. I say that I will see, and that perhaps it may be arranged."

"Very well."

"How is it very well? You don't understand, Benvenuto, that he takes everything that I say to him most seriously, and that I may be entering into a real engagement with him. It 's a fortnight since you laid down a rule of conduct for me to adopt, is it not?"

"Yes, I think so; I hardly remember."

"But I have a better memory than you. During the first five days I replied by reasoning gently with him: I told him he must try to conquer his passion, and love me no more. The next five days I listened in silence,

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and that was a very compromising kind of an answer; but you bade me do it, so I did it. Since then I have been driven to talk of my duty to you, and yesterday, master, I reached a point where I besought him to be generous, while he pressed me to confess my love for him."

"If that is so, it puts a different face on the matter," said Benvenuto.

"Ah, at last!" said Scozzone.

"Yes, now listen, little one. During the first three days of my absence, you will let him think that you love him; during the next three, you will confess your love."

"What, you bid me do that, Benvenuto!" cried Scozzone, deeply wounded at the master's too great confidence in her.

"Never you fear. What have you to reproach yourself for when I authorize you to do it?"

"Mon Dieu! nothing, I know," said Scozzone; "but being placed as I am between your indifference and his love, I may end by falling in love with him outright."

"Nonsense! in six days? Are n't you strong enough to remain indifferent to him six days?"

"Yes, indeed! I give you six days; but don't remain away seven, I beg you."

"No fear, my child, I will return in time. Adieu, Scozzone."

"Adieu, master," returned Scozzone, sulking, smiling, and weeping all at once.

While Cellini was giving Catherine these instructions, the provost and D'Orbec returned to the studio.

When they were left to themselves, with unrestricted freedom of movement, they went about their search in a sort of frenzy; they explored the garrets and cellars, sounded all the walls, moved all the furniture; they

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detained all the servants they met, and displayed the ardor of creditors with the patience of hunters. A hundred times they retraced their steps, examining the same thing again and again, like a sheriff's officer with a writ to serve, and when they had finished they were flushed and excited, but had discovered nothing.

"Well, messieurs," said Benvenuto, preparing to mount his horse, "you found nothing, eh? So much the worse! so much the worse! I understand what a painful thing it must be for two sensitive hearts like yours, but notwithstanding my sympathy with your suffering and my desire to assist in your search I must begone. If you feel called upon to visit the Grand-Nesle in my absence, do not hesitate, but make yourself perfectly at home here. I have given orders that the house be open to you at all times. My only consolation for leaving you in so anxious a frame of mind is the hope that I shall learn upon my return that you have found your daughter, Monsieur le Prévôt, and you your fair *fiancée*, Monsieur d'Orbec. Adieu, messieurs."

Thereupon he turned to his companions, who were standing in a group at the door, all save Ascanio, who doubtless did not care to stand face to face with his rival.

"Adieu, my children," he said. "If during my absence Monsieur le Prévôt desires to inspect my house a third time, do not forget to receive him as its former master."

With that little Jehan threw open the door, and Benvenuto galloped away.

"You see that we are idiots, my dear fellow," said Comte d'Orbec to the provost. "When a man has kidnapped a girl, he does n't go off to Romorantin with the court."

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VI.

CHARLES THE FIFTH AT FONTAINEBLEAU.

It was not without grave doubts and a terrible sinking at the heart that Charles V. stepped foot upon French territory, where earth and air were, so to speak, his enemies, whose king he had treated unworthily when he was a prisoner in his hands, and whose Dauphin he had perhaps poisoned, — he was at least accused of it. Europe anticipated terrible reprisals on the part of François I. from the moment that his rival placed himself in his power. But Charles's audacity, great gambler in empires that he was, would not permit him to draw back; and as soon as he had skilfully felt the ground and paved the way, he boldly crossed the Pyrenees.

He counted upon finding devoted friends at the French court, and thought that he could safely trust to three guaranties: the ambition of Madame d'Etampes, the overweening conceit of the Connétable Anne de Montmorency, and the king's chivalrous nature.

We have seen how and for what reason the duchess chose to serve his interests. With the constable it was a different matter. The great stumbling-block in the way of statesmen of all lands and all periods is the question of alliances. Politics, which, in this matter and many others, is perforce conjectural only, is often

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mistaken, alas! like the science of medicine, in studying the symptoms of affinities between peoples, and in risking remedies for their animosities. Now the constable was a monomaniac on the subject of the Spanish alliance. He had got it into his head that France's salvation lay in that direction, and provided that he could satisfy Charles V., who had been at war with his master twenty years out of twenty-five, he cared but little how much he displeased his other allies, the Turks and the Protestants, or let slip the most magnificent opportunities, like that which gave Flanders to François I.

The king had blind confidence in Montmorency. In truth the constable had in the last war against the Emperor displayed a hitherto unheard of resolution, and had checked the enemy's advance. To be sure he did it at the cost of the ruin of a province, by laying the country waste before him, by devastating a tenth part of France. But what especially impressed the king was his minister's haughty roughness of manner, his inflexible obstinacy, which to a superficial mind might seem cleverness and unswerving firmness of resolution. The result was that Francois listened to the "great suborner of men," as Brantôme calls him, with a deference equal to the fear inspired in his inferiors by this terrible reciter of *paternosters*, who alternated his prayers with hangings.

Charles V. could therefore safely rely upon the persevering friendship of the constable.

He placed even more reliance upon his rival's generosity. Indeed, François I. carried magnanimity to an absurd point.

"My kingdom," he said, "has no toll-house, like a bridge, and I do not sell my hospitality." The astute

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Charles knew that he could trust the word of the "knightly king."

Nevertheless, when the Emperor was fairly upon French territory, he could not overcome his apprehension and his doubts. He found the king's two sons awaiting him at the frontier, and throughout his journey they overwhelmed him with attentions and honors. But the crafty monarch shuddered as he thought that all this appearance of cordiality might conceal some deep-laid snare.

"I must say that I sleep very ill," he said, "in a foreign country."

He brought an anxious preoccupied face to the fêtes which were given him, and, as he advanced farther and farther toward the heart of the country, he became more and more sad and gloomy.

Whenever he rode into a city, he would ask himself, amid all the haranguing, as he passed beneath the triumphal arches, if that was the city where he was to be imprisoned; then he would murmur beneath his breath, "Not this or any other city, but all France, is my dungeon; all these assiduous courtiers are my jailers." And each hour as it passed added something to the apprehension of this tiger, who believed himself to be in a cage, and saw bars on all sides.

One day, as they were riding along, Charles d'Orléans, a fascinating, frolicsome child, — who was in great haste to be amiable and gallant, as a son of France, before dying of the plague like any peasant, — leaped lightly to the saddle behind the Emperor and threw his arms about his waist, crying gleefully, "Now you are my prisoner!" Charles became pale as death, and nearly fainted.

At Châtellerault, the poor imaginary captive was met

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by François, who welcomed him fraternally, and on the following day presented the whole court to him, — the valorous, magnificent nobility, the glory of the country, and the artists and men of letters, the glory of the king. The fêtes and merry-makings began in good earnest. The Emperor wore a brave face everywhere, but in his heart he was afraid, and constantly reproached himself for his imprudence. From time to time, as if to test his liberty, he would go out at daybreak from the château where he had lain at night, and he was delighted to see that his movements were not interfered with outside of the honors paid him. But could he be sure that he was not watched from a distance? Sometimes, as if from mere caprice, he changed the itinerary arranged for his journey, to the despair of François I., because part of the ceremonial prescribed by him went for naught as a consequence.

When he was within two day's ride of Paris he remembered with terror the French king's sojourn at Madrid. For an emperor the capital would seem to be the most honorable place of detention, and at the same time the surest. He therefore begged the king to escort him at once to Fontainebleau, of which he had heard so much. This overturned all of François's plans, but he was too hospitable to allow his disappointment to appear, and at once sent word to the queen and all the ladies to repair to Fontainebleau.

The presence of his sister Eleanora, and her confidence in her husband's good faith, allayed the Emperor's anxiety to some extent. But, although reassured for the moment, Charles V. was never able to feel at his ease while he was within the dominions of the King of France. François was the mirror of the past, Charles the type of the future. The sovereign of modern times

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never rightly understood the hero of the Middle Ages; it was impossible that there should be any real sympathy between the last of the chevaliers and the first of the diplomatists.

It is true Louis XI. might, strictly speaking, lay claim to this latter title, but in our opinion Louis XI. was not so much the scheming diplomatist as the grasping miser.

On the day of the Emperor's arrival there was a hunting party in the forest of Fontainebleau. Hunting was a favorite pastime of François I. It was not much better than a terrible bore to Charles V. Nevertheless he seized with avidity this further opportunity to see if he was not a prisoner; he let the hunt pass, took a by-road, and rode about at random until he was lost. But when he found that he was entirely alone in the middle of the forest, as free as the air that blew through the branches, or as the birds that flew through the air, he was almost wholly reassured, and began to recover his good humor in some measure. And yet the anxious expression returned to his face when, upon his making his appearance at the rendezvous, François came to him, flushed with the excitement of the chase, and still holding in his hand the bleeding boar-spear. The warrior of Marignano and Pavia was much in evidence in the king's pleasures.

"Come, my dear brother, let us enjoy ourselves!" said François, passing his arm through Charles's in a friendly way, when they had both alighted at the palace gate, and, leading him to the Galerie de Diane, resplendent with the paintings of Rosso and Primaticcio. "Vrai Dieu! you are as thoughtful as I was at Madrid. But you will agree, my dear brother, that I had some reason for being so, for I was your prisoner,

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while you are my guest; you are free, you are on the eve of a triumph. Rejoice therefore with us, if not because of the fêtes, which are doubtless beneath the notice of a great politician like yourself, at least in the thought that you are on your way to humble all those beer-drinking Flemings, who presume to talk of renewing the Communes. Or, better still, forget the rebels, and think only of enjoying yourself with friends. Does not my court impress you pleasantly?"

"It is superb, my brother," said Charles, "and I envy you. I too have a court — you have seen it — but a stern, joyless court, a gloomy assemblage of statesmen and generals like Lannoy, Peschiara, and Antonio de Leyra. But you have, beside your warriors and statesmen, beside your Montmorencys and Dubellays, beside your scholars, beside Budée, Duchâtel, and Lascaris, — beside all these you have your poets and your artists, Marot, Jean Goujon, Primaticcio, Benvenuto; and, above all, your adorable women, — Marguerite de Navarre, Diane de Poitiers, Catherine de Medicis, and so many others; and verily I begin to believe, my dear brother, that I would willingly exchange my gold mines for your flower-strewn fields."

"Ah! but you have not yet seen the fairest of all those lovely flowers," said François naïvely to Eleanora's brother.

"No, and I am dying with longing to see that marvellous pearl of loveliness," said the Emperor, who understood that the king alluded to Madame d'Etampes; "but even now I think that it is well said that yours is the fairest realm on earth, my brother."

"But you have the fairest countship, Flanders; the fairest duchy, Milan."

"You refused the first last month," said the Emperor,

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smiling, "and I thank you for so doing; but you covet the other, do you not?" he added with a sigh.

"Ah! let us not talk of serious matters to-day, my cousin, I beg you," said François; "after the pleasures of war there is nothing, I confess, which I like less to disturb than the pleasures of a festal occasion like the present."

"It is the truth," rejoined Charles, with the grimace of a miser, who realizes that he must pay a debt, "it is the truth that the Milanese is very dear to my heart, and that it would be like tearing my heart out to give it to you."

"Say rather to return it to me, my brother; that word would be more accurate, and would perhaps soften your disappointment. But that is not the matter in hand now; we must enjoy ourselves. We will talk of the Milanese later."

"Gift or restitution, given or returned," said the Emperor, "you will none the less possess one of the finest lordships in the world; for you shall have it, my brother; it is decided, and I will keep my engagements with you as faithfully as you keep yours with me."

"Mon Dieu!" cried François, beginning to be vexed at this everlasting recurrence to serious matters; "what do you regret, my brother? Are you not King of the Spains, Emperor of Germany, Count of Flanders, and lord, either by influence or by right of your sword, of all Italy, from the foot of the Alps to the farthest point of Calabria?"

"But you have France!" rejoined Charles with a sigh.

"You have the Indies and their golden treasures; you have Peru and the mines!"

"But you have France!"

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"You reign over an empire so vast that the sun never sets upon it."

"But you have France! What would your Majesty say, if I should cast an eye on this diamond among kingdoms, as fondly and gloatingly as you gaze upon that pearl of duchies, Milan?"

"Look, you, my brother," said François gravely, "I have instincts rather than ideas upon these momentous questions; but, as they say in your country, 'Do not touch the queen!' so I say to you, 'Do not touch France!'"

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Charles; "are we not cousins and allies?"

"Most certainly," was François's reply, "and I most earnestly hope that nothing will happen henceforth to embitter our relationship or disturb our alliance."

"I too hope so," said the Emperor. "But," he continued, with his cunning smile and hypocritical expression, "can I answer for the future, and prevent my son Philip, for instance, from falling out with your son Henri?"

"Such a quarrel would not be dangerous for France, if Augustus is succeeded by Tiberius."

"What matter who the master is?" said Charles, waxing warm; "the Empire will still be the Empire, and the Rome of the Cæsars was still Rome when the Cæsars had ceased to be Cæsars in everything save name."

"True, but the Empire of Charles V. is not the Empire of Octavius, my brother," said François, a little piqued. "Pavia was a glorious battle, but it was no Actium; then, too, Octavius was very wealthy, while, notwithstanding your Indian treasures and your Peruvian mines, you are well known to be in straitened

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circumstances financially; your unpaid troops were driven to sack Rome to procure means of subsistence, and now that Rome is sacked they are in revolt."

"And you, my brother," said Charles, "have alienated the royal domains, as I am informed, and are driven to treat Luther very tenderly, so that the German princes may consent to loan you money."

"Not to mention the fact," retorted François, "that your Cortes is very far from being so manageable as the Senate, while I can boast that I have freed the Kings of France from their dependence forever."

"Beware that your parliaments don't put you back into leading-strings some fine day."

The discussion was growing warm, both monarchs were getting excited, and the long standing antipathy which had kept them apart so long, was beginning to glow afresh. François was on the point of forgetting the duties of hospitality, and Charles the dictates of prudence, when the former suddenly remembered that he was beneath his own roof.

"On my word, my good brother," he exclaimed abruptly, laughing aloud, "I believe, by Mahomet's belly! that we were near losing our tempers. I told you that we must not talk of serious matters, but must leave such discussions to our ministers, and keep for ourselves only our good friendship. Come, let us agree, once for all, that you are to have the world, less France, and drop the subject."

"And less the Milanese, my brother," said Charles, realizing the imprudence he had been guilty of, and seeking at once to avoid its effects, "for the Milanese is yours. I have promised it to you, and I renew my promise."

As they exchanged these mutual assurances of con-

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tinuing good will, the door of the gallery opened, and Madame d'Etampes appeared. The king walked quickly to meet her, took her hand, and led her to where the Emperor stood, who, seeing her then for the first time, and, being fully informed as to what had taken place between her and Monsieur de Medina, fixed his most penetrating gaze upon her as she approached.

"My brother," said the king smiling, "do you see this fair dame?"

"Not only do I see her," replied Charles, "but I admire her."

"Very well! you do not know what she wants?"

"Is it one of my Spains? I will give it her."

"No, no, brother, not that."

"What then?"

"She wants me to detain you at Paris until you have destroyed the treaty of Madrid, and confirmed by acts the promise you have given me."

"If the advice is good, you should follow it," rejoined the Emperor, bowing low before the duchess, as much to hide the sudden pallor which these words caused to overspread his face, as to perform an act of courtesy.

He had no time to say more, nor could François see the effect produced by the words he had laughingly let fall, and which Charles was quite ready to take seriously, for the door opened again and the whole court poured into the gallery.

During the half-hour preceding dinner, when this clever, cultivated, corrupt throng was assembled in the salons of the palace, the scene we described apropos of the reception at the Louvre was re-enacted in all its essential details. There were the same men and the same women, the same courtiers and the same valets.

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Loving and malevolent glances were exchanged as usual, and sarcastic remarks and gallant speeches were indulged in with the customary freedom.

Charles V., spying Anne de Montmorency, whom he with good reason deemed to be his surest ally, went to him, and talked in a corner with him and the Duke of Medina, his ambassador.

"I will sign whatever you choose, constable," said the Emperor, who knew the old campaigner's loyalty; "prepare a deed of cession of the Duchy of Milan, and by Saint James, though it be one of the brightest jewels of my crown, I will sign an absolute surrender of it to you."

"A deed!" cried the constable, hotly putting aside the suggestion of a precaution which implied distrust. "A deed, Sire! what is your Majesty's meaning? No deed, Sire, no deed; your word, nothing more. Does your Majesty think that we shall have less confidence in you than you had in us, when you came to France with no written document to rely upon?"

"You will do as you should do, Monsieur de Montmorency," rejoined the Emperor, giving him his hand, "you will do what you should do."

The constable walked away.

"Poor dupe!" exclaimed the Emperor; "he plays at politics, Medina, as moles dig their holes, blindly."

"But the king, Sire?" queried Medina.

"The king is too proud of his own grandeur of soul not to be sure of ours. He will foolishly let us go, Medina, and we will prudently let him wait. To make him wait, my lord, is not to break my promise, but to postpone its fulfilment, that is all."

"But Madame d'Etampes?" suggested Medina.

"As to her we shall see," said the Emperor, moving

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up and down a magnificent ring with a superb diamond, which he wore on his left thumb. "Ah! I must have a long interview with her."

While these words were rapidly exchanged in low tones between the Emperor and his minister, the duchess was mercilessly making sport of Marmagne, apropos of his nocturnal exploits, all in presence of Messire d'Estourville.

"Can it be of your people, Monsieur de Marmagne," she was saying, "that Benvenuto tells every comer this extraordinary story? Attacked by four bandits, and with but one arm free to defend himself, he simply made these gentry escort him home. Were you one of these gentlemanly bravos, viscount?"

"Madame," replied poor Marmagne, in confusion, "it did not take place precisely in that way, and Benvenuto tells the story too favorably for himself."

"Yes, yes, I doubt not that he embroiders it a little, and adds a few details by way of ornament, but the main fact is true, viscount, the main fact is true; and in such matters the main fact is everything."

"Madame," returned Marmagne, "I promise you that I will have my revenge, and I shall be more fortunate next time."

"Pardon, viscount, pardon! it's not a question of revenge, but of beginning another game. Cellini, I should say, has won the first two bouts."

"Yes, thanks to my absence," muttered Marmagne, with increasing embarrassment; "because my men took advantage of my not being there to run away, the miserable villains!"

"Oh!" said the provost, "I advise you, Marmagne, to admit that you are beaten in that direction; you have no luck with Cellini."

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"In that case it seems to me that we may console each other, my dear provost," retorted Marmagne, "for if we add known facts to the mysterious rumors which are in circulation, — the capture of the Grand-Nesle to the reported disappearance of one of its fair inmates, — Cellini would seem not to have brought you luck either, Messire d'Estourville. To be sure, he is said to be actively interested in the fortunes of your family, if not in your own, my dear provost."

"Monsieur de Marmagne," cried the provost fiercely, in a furious rage to learn that his paternal infelicity was beginning to be noised abroad, — "Monsieur de Marmagne, you will explain to me later what you mean by your words."

"Ah messieurs, messieurs!" exclaimed the duchess, "do not forget, I beg you, that I am here. You are both in the wrong. Monsieur le Prévôt, it is not for those who know so little about seeking to ridicule those who know so little about finding. Monsieur de Marmagne, in the hour of defeat we must unite against the common enemy, and not afford him the additional satisfaction of seeing the vanquished slashing at one another's throats. They are going to the *salle-à-manger;* your hand, Monsieur de Marmagne. Ah, well! since it seems that men, for all their strength, avail nothing against Cellini, we will see if a woman's wiles will find him equally invincible. I have always thought that allies were simply in the way, and have always loved to make war alone. The risk is greater, I know, but at least the honors of victory are not to be shared with any one."

"The impertinent varlet!" exclaimed Marmagne; "see how familiarly he is talking to our great king. Would not one say he was nobly born, whereas he is naught but a mere stone-cutter."

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"What's that you say, viscount? Why, he is a nobleman, and of the most venerable nobility!" said the duchess, with a laugh. "Do you know of many among our oldest families who descend from a lieutenant of Julius Cæsar, and who have the three *fleurs-de-lis* and the *lambel* of the house of Anjou in their crest? 'T is not the king who honors the sculptor by speaking to him, messieurs, as you see; the sculptor, on the other hand, confers honor upon the king by condescending to address him."

François I. and Cellini were in fact conversing at that moment with the familiarity to which the great ones of earth had accustomed the chosen artist of Heaven.

"Well, Benvenuto," the king was saying, "how do we come on with our Jupiter?"

"I am preparing to cast it, Sire."

"And when will that great work be performed?"

"Immediately upon my return to Paris, Sire."

"Take our best foundrymen, Cellini, and omit nothing to make the operation successful. If you need money, you know that I am ready."

"I know that you are the greatest, the noblest, and the most generous king on earth, Sire," replied Benvenuto; "but thanks to the salary which your Majesty orders paid to me, I am rich. As to the operation concerning which you are somewhat anxious, Sire, I will, with your gracious permission, rely upon my own resources to prepare and execute it. I distrust all your French foundrymen, not that they are unskilful, but because I am afraid that their national pride will make them disinclined to place their skill at the service of an artist from beyond the Alps. And I confess, Sire, that I attach too much importance to the success of my Jupiter to allow any other than myself to lay hand to it."

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"Bravo, Cellini, bravo!" cried the king; "spoken like a true artist."

"Moreover," added Benvenuto, "I wish to be entitled to remind your Majesty of the promise you made me."

"That is right, my trusty friend. If we are content with it, we are to grant you a boon. We have not forgotten. Indeed, if we should forget, we bound ourselves in the presence of witnesses. Is it not so, Montmorency? and Poyet? Our constable and our chancellor will remind us of our plighted word."

"Ah! your Majesty cannot conceive how precious that word has become to me since the day it was given."

"Very well! it shall be kept, Monsieur. But the doors are open. To table, messieurs, to table!"

François thereupon joined the Emperor, and the two together walked at the head of the procession formed by the illustrious guests. Both wings of the folding doors being thrown open, the two sovereigns entered side by side and took places facing each other, Charles between Eleanora and Madame d'Etampes, François between Catherine de Medicis and Marguerite de Navarre.

The banquet was exquisite and the guests in the best of spirits. François was in his element, and enjoyed himself in kingly fashion, but laughed like a serf at all the tales told him by Marguerite de Navarre. Charles overwhelmed Madame d'Etampes with compliments and attentions. The others talked of art and politics, and so the time passed.

At dessert, as was customary, the pages brought water for the guests to wash their hands. Thereupon Madame d'Etampes took the ewer and basin intended for Charles V. from the hands of the servitor, while

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Marguerite did the same for François, poured water from the ewer into the basin, and, kneeling upon one knee, according to the Spanish etiquette, presented the basin to the Emperor. He dipped the ends of his fingers, gazing at his noble and beautiful attendant the while, and laughingly dropped the superb ring, of which we have spoken, into the water.

"Your Majesty is losing your ring," said Anne, dipping her own taper fingers into the water, and daintily picking up the jewel, which she handed to the Emperor.

"Keep the ring, madame," the Emperor replied, in a low voice; "the hands in which it now is are too noble and too beautiful for me to take it from them again. It is to bind the bargain for the Duchy of Milan," he added, in a still lower tone.

The duchess smiled and said no more. The pebble had fallen at her feet, but the pebble was worth a million.

As they returned from the *salle-à-manger* to the salon, and passed thence to the ball-room, Madame d'Etampes stopped Benvenuto, who was brought near to her by the press.

"Messire Cellini," said she, handing him the ring which constituted a pledge of the alliance between the Emperor and herself, "here is a diamond which you will hand, if you please, to your pupil Ascanio, for the crown of my lily; it is the dewdrop I promised him."

"And it has fallen from Aurora's fingers in very truth, madame," rejoined the artist with a mocking smile and affected gallantry.

He glanced at the ring, and started back in surprise, for he recognized the diamond he had long ago set for

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"'Your Majesty is losing your ring,' said Anne."

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Pope Clement VII. and had himself carried to the sublime Emperor on the sovereign Pontiff's behalf.

To induce Charles V. to divest himself of such a priceless jewel, especially in favor of a woman, there must necessarily be some secret understanding, some occult treaty, between himself and the recipient.

While Charles continues to pass his days and nights at Fontainebleau, in the alternations of distrust and confidence, we have endeavored to describe, while he schemes, intrigues, burrows underground, promises, retracts, and promises anew, let us cast a glance upon the Grand-Nesle, and see if anything of interest is occurring among those of its occupants who have remained there.

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VII.

THE GHOSTLY MONK.

THE whole colony was in a state of intense excitement. The ghost of the monk, the unsubstantial guest of the convent, upon the ruins of which Amaury's palace was built, had returned within three or four days. Dame Perrine had seen him walking around at night in the gardens of the Grand-Nesle, clad in his long white frock, and treading so lightly that he left no footprints on the ground, and made no noise.

How happened it that Dame Perrine, whose domicile was the Petit-Nesle, had seen the ghostly visitor walking in the garden of the Grand-Nesle at three o'clock in the morning? We cannot tell except by committing a very grave indiscretion, but we are historians first of all, and our readers are entitled to know the most secret details of the lives of the characters we have brought upon the stage, especially when those details are calculated to throw a bright light upon the sequel of our narrative.

Dame Perrine, by virtue of Colombe's disappearance, by the retirement of Pulchérie, for whose presence there was no further pretext, and by the departure of the provost, was left absolute mistress of the Petit-Nesle; for the gardener Raimbault and his assistants were, for economical reasons, engaged in Messire

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d'Estourville's service during the day only. Dame Perrine found herself, therefore, queen of the Petit-Nesle, but at the same time a solitary queen, so that she nearly died of ennui during the day, and of fear at night.

It occurred to her that there was a remedy for this unfortunate condition of affairs, during the day at least; her friendly relations with Dame Ruperta opened the doors of the Grand-Nesle to her. She asked permission to visit her neighbors, and it was most cordially granted.

But upon availing herself of this permission Dame Perrine was naturally brought in contact with her neighbors of the other sex. Dame Perrine was a buxom creature of thirty-six years, who confessed to twenty-nine of them. Plump and rosy still, and always prepossessing, her coming was quite an event in the studio, where ten or twelve worthy fellows were forging, cutting, filing, hammering, chiselling, — good livers all, fond of play on Sundays, of wine on Sundays and holidays, and of the fair sex all the time. Three of our old acquaintances, after three or four days had passed, were all brought down with the same arrow.

They were little Jehan, Simon-le-Gaucher, and Hermann the German.

Ascanio, Jacques Aubry, and Pagolo escaped the charm, having their minds on other things.

The other comrades may well have felt some sparks of this Greek fire, but they realized their inferior position, no doubt, and poured the water of their humility upon the first sparks before they became a conflagration.

Little Jehan loved after the manner of Cherubino, that is to say, he was in love with loving. Dame

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Perrine, as the reader will readily understand, had too much common sense to respond to such an *ignis fatuus* as that.

Simon-le-Gaucher could offer more reliable future prospects, and his flame promised to be more enduring, but Dame Perrine was a very superstitious person. She had seen Simon cross himself with his left hand, and she reflected that it would be necessary for him to sign the marriage contract with his left hand. Dame Perrine was convinced that the sign of the cross executed with the left hand was calculated to destroy rather than to save a soul, and in like manner no one could have persuaded her that a marriage contract signed with the left hand could have any other result than an unhappy menage. She therefore, but without disclosing the reasons for her repugnance, received Simon-le-Gaucher's first advances in a way to make him renounce all hope.

Hermann remained. Ah, Hermann! that was a different matter.

Hermann was no coxcomb, like little Jehan, nor a man with the seal of Nature's displeasure upon him, like left-handed Simon; in Hermann's personality there was something honest and outspoken which appealed to Dame Perrine's heart. Moreover, Hermann, instead of having a left hand for the right and *vice versa*, made use of either or both so energetically that he seemed to have two right hands. He was a magnificent man too, according to all vulgar ideas. Dame Perrine therefore had fixed her choice upon Hermann.

But, as we know, Hermann was as innocent as Celadon. The result was that Dame Perrine's first broadsides, the pouting and sighs and sidelong glances, were

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utterly powerless against the naïve timidity of the honest German. He contented himself with staring at Dame Perrine out of his great round eyes; but, like the blind men of the Gospel, "eyes had he, but he saw not," or if he did see, he saw the buxom governess as a whole simply, without noting details. Dame Perrine repeatedly proposed that they should go for a walk on the Quai des Augustins, or in the gardens of the Grand- or Petit-Nesle, and on every occasion she selected Hermann for her cavalier. This made Hermann very happy internally. His great Teutonic heart beat five or six extra pulsations a minute when Dame Perrine was hanging upon his arm; but either because he found some difficulty in pronouncing the French language, or because it gave him greater pleasure to hear the object of his secret thoughts talk, Dame Perrine could rarely extract anything more from him than these two sacramental phrases, "Ponchour, matemoizelle," and "Atieu, matemoizelle," which Hermann generally pronounced at an interval of two hours; the first when Dame Perrine took his arm, the second when she let it go. Now, although this title of Mademoiselle was immensely flattering to Dame Perrine, and although there was something very agreeable in talking two hours without fear of interruption, she would have been glad to have her monologue broken in upon by an occasional interjection which might give her some idea of the progress she was making in the heart of her mute attendant.

Her progress, however, was none the less real for not being expressed in words or by play of feature; the fire was kindled in the honest German's heart, and, being fanned every day by Dame Perrine's presence, became a veritable volcano. Hermann began at last to be con-

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scious of the preference Dame Perrine accorded him, and he was only waiting until he was a little more certain of it to declare himself. Dame Perrine understood his hesitation. One evening, as he parted from her at the door of the Petit-Nesle, she saw that he was so agitated that she thought it would be a real kindness on her part to press his hand. Hermann, transported with delight, responded by a similar demonstration; but to his great amazement Dame Perrine gave a piercing shriek. In his delirious bliss, Hermann did not measure his pressure. He thought that the tighter he squeezed her hand, the more accurate idea he would convey of the violence of his passion; and he very nearly crushed the poor governess's fingers.

Hermann was thunderstruck by her shriek; but Dame Perrine, fearing to discourage him just as he had summoned up courage to make his first advance, forced herself to smile, and said, as she separated her fingers, which were almost glued together for the moment: —

"It 's nothing, nothing, dear Monsieur Hermann; it 's nothing, absolutely nothing."

"Tausend pardons, Matemoizelle Perrine," said the German, "but I lofe you sehr viel, and I haf pressed your hant as I lofe you! Tausend pardons!"

"There 's no need, Monsieur Hermann, there 's no need. Your love is an honorable love, I trust, which a woman need not blush to win."

"O Tieu! O Tieu!" cried Hermann, "indeed, my lofe is honorable, Matemoizelle Perrine; put I haf not yet tared to speak to you of it; put since die wort haf escaped me, I lofe you, I lofe you, I lofe you sehr viel, Matemoizelle Perrine."

"And I, Monsieur Hermann," said Dame Perrine mincingly, "think I can say, for I believe you to be a

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gallant youth, incapable of compromising a poor woman, that — Mon Dieu ! how shall I say it ? "

"Oh say it ! say it ! " cried Hermann.

"Well ! that — ah, it is wrong of me to confess it! "

"Nein, nein ! it is not wrong. Say it ! say it ! "

"Very well. I confess that I am not indifferent to your passion."

"Sacrement ! " cried the German, beside himself with joy.

Now one evening when, after a promenade, the Juliet of the Petit-Nesle had escorted her Romeo to the door of the Grand-Nesle, she espied as she was returning alone through the garden door, the white spectre we have mentioned, which, in the opinion of the worthy governess, could be no other than that of the monk. It is needless to say that Dame Perrine entered the house half dead with fear, and barricaded herself in her room.

The next morning the whole studio was acquainted with the story of the nocturnal apparition. Dame Perrine, however, contented herself with relating the simple fact without going into details. The ghostly monk had appeared. That was the whole of it. It was useless to question her, for she would say nothing more.

All that day the ghostly monk was the engrossing subject of conversation at the Grand-Nesle. Some believed in the appearance of the phantom, others laughed at it. It was noticed that Ascanio was the leader of the sceptics, the others being little Jehan, Simon-le-Gaucher, and Jacques Aubry. The faction of the believers included Dame Ruperta, Scozzone, Pagolo, and Hermann.

In the evening they all assembled in the second

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marks of appreciation evoked by her narrative, "a handsome young man was brought before the prior, who requested to be admitted to the convent as a novice; he had no beard as yet, but he had large eyes as black as ebony, and long dark hair with a glossy shimmer like jet, so that he was admitted without hesitation. He said that his name was Antonio, and requested to be attached to the personal service of the prior, a request which was granted without hesitation. I spoke of voices just now, but Antonio's was the fresh and melodious voice *par excellence*. Everybody who heard him sing on the following Sunday was carried away by it, and yet there was a something in the voice which distressed even while it fascinated you, a quality which aroused worldly rather than celestial ideas in the hearts of those who listened to it; but all the monks were so pure of heart that none but strangers experienced this singular emotion, and Don Enguerrand, who was utterly unconscious of anything of the sort, was so enchanted with Antonio's voice that he appointed him thenceforth to sing the responses in the anthems alone, alternately with the organ.

"The conduct of the young novice was most exemplary, and he waited upon the prior with incredible zeal and earnestness. The only thing for which he could possibly be reproved was his constant fits of distraction from his devotions; always and everywhere his glowing eyes were fastened upon the prior.

"'What are you looking at, Antonio?' Don Enguerrand would say to him.

"'I am looking at you, my father,' would be the reply.

"'Look at your prayer-book, Antonio. Now what are you looking at?'

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"'You, my father.'

"'Antonio, look at the image of the Virgin. What are you looking at now?'

"'You, my father.'

"'Antonio, look at the crucifix which we adore.'

"Don Enguerrand began to notice, after a time, upon searching his conscience, that since Antonio's reception into the community he had been more troubled than formerly by evil thoughts. Never before had he sinned more than seven times a day, which, as we all know, is the reckoning of the saints, — sometimes even he had examined his conduct for the day without being able to find more than five or six sins, an extraordinary thing. But now the total of his daily peccadillos mounted as high as ten, twelve, or even fifteen. He would try to make up for it on the following day; he would pray and fast and scourge himself, would the worthy man. Ah! but the farther he went, the greater became the reckoning, until at last it reached a full score. Poor Don Enguerrand knew not which way to turn; he felt that he was damned in spite of all he could do, and he noticed — an observation which might have comforted another, but which increased his consternation — that his most austere monks were under the same strange, incredible, incomprehensible influence; so that their confession, which formerly lasted twenty minutes, half an hour, or an hour at most, now occupied several hours.

"About this time, an occurrence which had been creating a great stir in the province for a month past at last became known at the convent. The lord of a castle near by had lost his daughter Antonia. Antonia had disappeared one fine evening exactly as my poor Colombe has disappeared. But there is this difference:

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I am sure that Colombe is an angel, while it seems that Antonia was possessed of the devil. The poor father had sought the fugitive high and low, just as Monsieur le Prévôt has sought Colombe. Only the convent remained to be visited, and as he knew that the evil spirit, the better to elude search, sometimes conceals himself in monasteries, he sent his chaplain to Don Enguerrand to ask permission to make search in his. The prior assented, with the best possible grace. Perhaps, he thought, he might by means of this visit discover something concerning the magic influence which had been weighing upon him and his brethren for a month past. But no! the search had no result whatever, and the nobleman was about to retire more despairing than ever, when all the monks passed in procession before him and Don Enguerrand, on their way to the chapel for the evening service. He looked at them mechanically, one after another, until the last one passed, when he cried out: —

"'God in heaven! that is Antonia! that is my daughter!'

"Antonia, for it was she, became as pale as a lily.

"'What are you doing in this sacred garb?' continued the father.

"'What am I doing, father?' said Antonia; 'I am loving Don Enguerrand with all my heart.'

"'Leave this convent instantly, wretched girl!' cried her father.

"'I will go out only as a corpse, father,' replied Antonia.

"Thereupon, despite her father's outcries, she darted into the chapel on the heels of the monks, and took her place in her accustomed stall. The prior stood as if turned to stone. The furious nobleman would have

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pursued his daughter, but Don Enguerrand begged him not to profane the holy place by such a scandalous scene, and to wait until the service was at an end. The father consented, and followed Don Enguerrand into the chapel.

"The anthem was about to be chanted, and the majestic prelude upon the organ was like the voice of God. A wonderfully beautiful strain, but instinct with bitter irony, and awful to hear, responded to the sublime tones of the instrument; it was Antonia's voice, and every listening heart shuddered. The organ took up the chant, calm, grave, impressive, and seemed as if it were seeking to drown with its divine magnificence the bitter strains which insulted it from the stalls. Again, as if in acceptance of the challenge, Antonia's voice arose more wildly despairing, more impious, than before. Everybody awaited in speechless dismay the result of this awful dialogue, this alternation of blasphemy and prayer, this strange conflict between God and Satan, and it was amid the most intense and agonizing silence that the celestial music burst forth like a peal of thunder, when the blasphemous strain died away, and poured out upon the heads of the listeners, all bowed save one, the torrents of its wrath. It was something like the dread voice which the guilty will hear on the judgment day. Antonia tried to keep up the contest, but her song this time was nothing more than a shrill, heart-rending cry, like the laugh of the damned, and she fell pale and stiff upon the pavement of the chapel. When they raised her, she was dead."

"Jésus Maria!" cried Dame Ruperta.

"Poor Antonia!" said Hermann innocently.

"Little fool!" muttered Jacques Aubry.

The others kept silence, so great was the impression

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produced even upon the sceptics by Dame Perrine's narrative, but Scozzone wiped away a tear, and Pagolo crossed himself.

"When the prior," resumed Dame Perrine, "saw the devil's messenger thus crushed by the wrath of God, he believed, poor dear man, that he was forever delivered from the snares of the tempter; but he reckoned without his host, a very appropriate expression, as he had been so imprudent as to extend his hospitality to one possessed of the devil. On the following night, just after he had dropped off to sleep, he was awakened by the clanking of chains; he opened his eyes, instinctively turned them toward the door, and saw that it swung open unaided, and at the same time a phantom clad in the white robe of a novice drew near the bed, took him by the arm, and cried, 'I am Antonia! Antonia, who loves thee! and God has given me full power over thee because thou hast sinned, in thought if not in act.' And every night at midnight the terrible apparition returned, implacably true to its word, until at last Don Enguerrand made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and died, by the special favor of God, just as he knelt before the Holy Sepulchre.

"But Antonia was not satisfied. She fell back upon all the monks in general, and, as there were very few who had not sinned as deeply as the poor prior, she visited them all one after another during the night, roughly awaking them, and crying in an awe-inspiring voice: 'I am Antonia! I am Antonia, who loves thee!'

"Hence the name of the ghostly monk.

"When you are walking through the streets at night, and a figure with a gray or white hood dogs your steps, hasten home; it is the ghostly monk in quest of prey.

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"When the convent was demolished to make room for the château, they hoped to be rid of the spectre, but it seems that he is fond of the spot. At various times he has reappeared. And now, God forgive us our sins! the unhappy wretch has appeared again. May God preserve us from his wicked designs!"

"Amen!" said Dame Ruperta, crossing herself.

"Amen!" said Hermann, with a shudder.

"Amen!" said Jacques Aubry, laughing.

And each of the others repeated the word with an inflection corresponding to the impression produced upon him.

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VIII.

WHAT ONE SEES AT NIGHT FROM THE TOP OF A POPLAR.

On the following day, which was that on which the whole court was to return from Fontainebleau, it was Dame Ruperta's turn to announce to the same auditory that she had a momentous revelation to make.

As may be imagined, after such an interesting announcement, the whole party assembled once more in the same spot at the same hour.

They were entirely at their case, because Benvenuto had written to Ascanio that he should stay behind for two or three days to prepare the hall where his Jupiter was to be displayed, which Jupiter was to be cast immediately upon his return.

The provost had simply made his appearance at the Hôtel de Nesle to ask if there was any news of Colombe; but upon being informed by Dame Perrine that everything was *in statu quo*, he at once returned to the Châtelet.

The occupants of the Grand and Petit-Nesle enjoyed entire freedom of action, therefore, both masters being absent.

In the case of Jacques Aubry, although he was to have met Gervaise that evening, curiosity carried the day over love, or rather he hoped that Dame Ruperta would be less diffuse than Dame Perrine, and that she

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would have finished so early that he might hear her story and still keep his appointment.

This is what Ruperta had to tell.

Dame Perrine's narrative ran in her head all night long, and from the moment that she entered her bedroom she trembled in every limb lest Antonia's spirit should pay her a visit, notwithstanding the blessed relics which hung about her bed.

She barricaded her door, but that was a very inadequate precaution; the old servant was too well versed in the ways of phantoms not to be aware that they know nothing of closed doors. Nevertheless she would have liked also to barricade the window looking upon the garden of the Grand-Nesle, but the original proprietor had neglected to provide the window with shutters, and the present proprietor deemed it useless to burden himself with that expense.

Ordinarily there were curtains at the window; but at this time, as luck would have it, they were at the laundry. The window offered no protection, therefore, save an unpretentious pane of glass, as transparent as the air that it excluded.

On entering the room Ruperta looked under the bed, felt in all the drawers and closets, and did not leave a single corner uninspected. She knew that the devil occupies but little space when he draws in his tail and claws and horns, and that Asmodeus was corked up in a bottle for nobody knows how many years.

The room was entirely untenanted, and there was not the slightest trace of the ghostly monk.

Ruperta went to bed therefore somewhat more at ease, but she left her lamp burning none the less. She was no sooner in bed than she looked toward the window, and saw outside the window a gigantic figure, whose

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outlines were just discernible in the darkness, and which intercepted the light of the stars. The moon was invisible as it was in its last quarter.

Good Ruperta shivered with fear; she was on the point of crying out or knocking, when she remembered the colossal statue of Mars which reared its head before her window. She immediately looked again in that direction, and recognized perfectly all the outlines of the god of war. This reassured Ruperta for the moment, and she determined positively to go to sleep.

But sleep, the poor man's treasure so often coveted by the rich, is at no man's orders. At night God opens heaven's gates for him, and the capricious rascal visits whom he pleases, turning aside disdainfully from him who calls, and knocking at their doors who least expect him. Ruperta invoked him long before he paid heed to her.

At last, toward midnight, fatigue won the day. Little by little, the good woman's faculties became confused, her thoughts which were in general but ill connected, broke the imperceptible thread which held them, and scattered like the beads of a rosary. Her heart alone, distraught by fear, was still awake; at last it too fell fast asleep, and all was said; the lamp alone kept vigil.

But, like all things of earth, the lamp found rest two hours after Ruperta had closed her eyes in the sleep of the just. Upon the pretext that it had no oil to burn, it began to grow dim, sputtered, blazed up for an instant, and then died.

Just at that time Ruperta had a fearful dream; she dreamed that, as she was returning home from visiting Perrine, the ghostly monk pursued her; but happily, against all precedents of those who dream, Ruperta to

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her joy found that she had the legs of fifteen years, and fled so swiftly that the ghostly monk, although he seemed to glide and not to run over the ground, only arrived in time to have the door slammed in his face. Ruperta thought, still dreaming, that she heard him snarl and pound upon the door. But, as may be imagined, she was in no haste to let him in. She lit her lamp, ran up the stairs four at a time, jumped into bed, and put out the light.

But, just as she put out the light, she saw the monk's head outside her window; he had crawled up the wall like a lizard, and was trying to come through the glass. In her dream, she heard the grinding of his nails against it.

No sleep can be so sound as to hold out against a dream of that sort. Ruperta awoke with her hair standing on end, and dripping with icy perspiration. Her eyes were open, staring wildly around, and in spite of her they sought the window. With that she uttered a fearful shriek, for this is what she saw.

She saw the head of the colossal Mars shooting forth flame from its eyes and nose and mouth and ears.

She thought at first that she was still asleep, and that it was a continuation of her dream; but she pinched herself till the blood came to make sure that she was really awake; she crossed herself, and repeated mentally three *Paters* and two *Aves*, and the extraordinary phenomena did not disappear.

Ruperta summoned strength enough to put out her hand, seize her broom, and pound against the ceiling with the handle thereof. Hermann slept in the room above hers, and she hoped that the sturdy Teuton would be aroused and hurry to her assistance. But in vain did Ruperta knock: Hermann gave no sign of life.

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in due time and urged them to aim at the joints in my armor; but Saint Maledent, my patron, whom I invoked in a whisper, turned their blows aside. At last that devil of a father, in order to show the youngsters how to carry away a visor, took a lance himself, and at the first blow uncovered my pale and terrified face. I thought I was lost."

"Poor fellow!" said Fracasso sadly, "how could it be otherwise."

"Fancy, if you please, that when they saw my colorless face they took me for the ghost of their great-grandfather; and father and sons scuttled away as if the devil was at their heels. Need I say more? I turned my back, and did as much for my own part; and you see I came out of it with a whole skin."

"Very good, but the important thing in our trade, friend Maledent," said Procope, "is not only to receive blows manfully, but to deal them handsomely. It's a fine thing when the victim falls without a sound. In one of my expeditions in Flanders I had to rid one of my customers of four of his intimate friends, who were travelling in company. He proposed at first that I should take three comrades, but I told him that I would undertake it alone, or not at all. It was agreed that I should do as I chose, and that I should have the stipend four times over provided that I delivered four dead bodies. I knew the road they were to take, and I awaited their coming at an inn which they must of necessity pass.

"The inn-keeper had formerly belonged to the fraternity, and had left it for his present occupation, which allowed him to plunder travellers without risk; but he retained some kindly sentiments for his former brethren, so that I had no great difficulty in winning him over to

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my interest in consideration of a tenth of the reward. With that understanding we awaited our four horsemen, who soon appeared around a bend in the road, and alighted in front of the inn, preparatory to filling their stomachs and resting their horses. The landlord said to them that his stable was so small that, unless they went in one at a time, they could hardly move there, and would be in each other's way. The first who entered was so slow about coming out, that the second lost patience and went to see what he was doing. He also was in no hurry to reappear, whereupon the third, weary of waiting, followed the other two. After some little time, as the fourth was expressing his astonishment at their delay, mine host remarked: 'Ah! I see what it is: the stable is so extremely small, that they have gone out through the door at the rear.'

"This explanation encouraged my last man to join his companions and myself, for you will have guessed that I was in the stable. I allowed him, however, the satisfaction of uttering one little cry, to say farewell to the world, as there was no longer any danger.

"In Roman law, Ferrante, would not that be called *trucidatio per divisionem necis?* But, deuce take it!" added Procope, changing his tone, "our man doesn't come. God grant that nothing has happened to him! It will be pitch dark very soon."

"*Suadentque cadentia sidera somnos,*" added Fracasso. "And by the way, my friends, take care that Benvenuto does n't in the dark resort to a trick which I once put in practice myself: it was during my sojourn on the banks of the Rhine. I always loved the banks of the Rhine, the country there is so picturesque and at the same time so melancholy. The Rhine is the river of dreamers. I was dreaming then upon the

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banks of the Rhine, and this was the subject of my dreams.

"A nobleman named Schreckenstein, if my memory serves me, was to be put to death. It was no easy matter, for he never went out without a strong escort. This is the plan upon which I finally resolved.

"I donned a costume like that worn by him, and one dark evening I lay in wait for him and his escort. When I saw them coming through the solitude and darkness, *obscuri sub nocte*, I made a desperate attack upon Schreckenstein, who was walking a little ahead; but I was clever enough to strike off his hat with its waving plumes, and then to change my position so that I was standing where he should have been. Thereupon I stunned him with a violent blow with my sword hilt, and began to shout amid the clashing of swords and the shouts of the others, 'Help! help! death to the brigands!' so that Schreckenstein's men fell furiously upon their master and left him dead upon the spot, while I glided away into the bushes. The worthy nobleman could at least say that he was killed by his friends."

"It was a bold stroke," said Ferrante, "but if I were to cast a backward glance upon my vanished past I could find a still more audacious exploit there. Like you, Fracasso, I had to deal with a chief of partisans, always well mounted and escorted. It was in a forest in the Abruzzi. I stationed myself in an enormous oak tree upon a great branch which stretched out over the road at a point which the personage in question must pass; and there I waited, musing. The sun was rising and its first rays fell in long shafts of pale light down through the moss-grown branches; the morning air was fresh and keen, enlivened by the songs of birds. Suddenly —"

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"Sh!" Procope interrupted him. "I hear footsteps: attention! it's our man."

"Good!" muttered Maledent, glancing furtively about; "all is silent and deserted hereabout; fortune is on our side."

They stood without speaking or moving; their dark, threatening faces could not be distinguished in the gathering gloom, but one might have seen their gleaming eyes, their hands playing nervously with their rapiers, and their attitude of breathless suspense; in the half-darkness they formed a striking dramatic group, which no pencil but Salvator Rosa's could adequately reproduce.

It was in fact Benvenuto coming on at a rapid pace; as we have said, his suspicions were aroused, and with his piercing glance he maintained a constant watch in the darkness. As his eyes were accustomed to the uncertain light he saw the four bandits issue from their ambush when he was still twenty yards away, and had time to throw his cloak over his basket, and draw his sword, before they were upon him. Furthermore, with the self-possession which never abandoned him, he backed against the church wall, and thus faced all of his assailants.

They attacked him savagely. He could not retreat, and it was useless to cry out as the château was five hundred yards away. But Benvenuto was no novice in deeds of arms, and he received the cut-throats with vigor.

His mind remained perfectly clear, and a sudden thought flashed through it as he plied his sword. It was evident that this ambuscade was directed against him, and no other. If therefore he could succeed in throwing them off the track, he was saved. He began

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therefore, as the blows rained down upon him, to joke them upon their pretended mistake.

"What fit has seized you, my fine fellows? Are you mad? What do you expect to make out of an old soldier like me? Is it my cloak that you want? Does my sword tempt you? Stay, stay, you! If you want my good sword, you must earn it! Sang-Dieu! By my soul, for thieves who seem to have served their apprenticeship, your scent is bad, my children."

With that he charged upon them, instead of falling back before them, but only took one or two steps away from the wall, and immediately placed his back against it once more, incessantly slashing and thrusting, taking pains to throw aside his cloak several times, so that, if they had been warned by Comte d'Orbec's servants, whom he had seen leave the house, and who had seen him count the money, they would at least conclude that he had not the gold upon him. Indeed, his assured manner of speaking, and the ease with which he handled his sword with a thousand crowns under his arm, caused the bravos to entertain some doubts.

"Damnation! do you suppose we have made a mistake, Ferrante?" said Fracasso.

"I fear so. The man seemed not so tall to me; or even if it is he, he has n't the gold, and that damned viscount deceived us."

"I have gold!" cried Benvenuto, thrusting and parrying vigorously all the while. "I have no gold save a handful of gilded copper; but if you are ambitious to secure that, my children, you will pay dearer for it than if it were gold belonging to another, I promise you."

"Deuce take him!" said Procope, "he's really a soldier. Could any goldsmith fence so cleverly as he?

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Expend all your wind on him, if you choose, you fellows; I don't fight for glory."

And Procope began to beat a retreat, grumbling to himself, while the attack of the others relaxed in vigor, by reason of their doubts, as well as of his absence. Benvenuto, with no such motive for weakening, seized the opportunity to drive them back, and to start for the château, backing before his assailants, but fighting all the time, and defending himself manfully. The savage boar was luring the hounds with him to his den.

"Come, my brave fellows, come with me," he said "bear me company as far as the entrance to the Pré-aux-Clercs, the Maison Rouge, where my sweetheart, whose father sells wine, is expecting me to-night. The road is n't very safe, so they say, and I should be glad to have an escort."

Upon that pleasantry, Fracasso also abandoned the chase, and went to join Procope.

"We are fools, Ferrante!" said Maledent; "this is n't your Benvenuto."

"Yes, yes, I say it is himself," cried Ferrante, who had at last discovered the basket bulging out with money under Benvenuto's arm, as a too sudden movement disarranged his cloak.

But it was too late: the château was within a hundred feet or less, and Benvenuto was shouting in his powerful voice: "Hôtel de Nesle! ho! help! help!"

Fracasso had barely time to retrace his steps, Procope to hasten up, and Ferrante and Maledent to redouble their efforts; the workmen who were expecting their master, were on the alert. The door of the château was flung open at his first shout, and Hermann the colossus, little Jehan, Simon-le-Gaucher, and Jacques Aubry came running out armed with pikes.

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At that sight the bravos turned and fled.

"Wait, wait, my dear young friends," Benvenuto shouted to the fugitives; "won't you escort me a little farther? O the bunglers! who could n't take from one lone man a thousand golden crowns which tired his arm!"

The brigands had in fact succeeded in inflicting no other injury than a slight scratch upon their opponent's hand, and they made their escape shamefaced, and Fracasso howling with pain. Poor Fracasso at the very last lost his right eye, and was one-eyed for the rest of his days, a circumstance which accentuated the tinge of melancholy which was the most prominent characteristic of his pensive countenance.

"Well, my children," said Benvenuto to his companions, when the footsteps of the bravos had died away in the distance, "we must have some supper after that exploit. Come all and drink to my escape, my dear rescuers. But God help me! I do not see Ascanio among you. Where is Ascanio?"

The reader will remember that Ascanio left the Louvre before his master.

"I know where he is?" said little Jehan.

"Where is he, my boy?" asked Benvenuto.

"Down at the end of the garden, where he has been walking for half an hour; the student and I went there to talk with him, but he begged us to leave him alone."

"Strange!" said Benevenuto. "How did he fail to hear my shout? How is it that he did not hasten to me with the others? Do not wait for me, but sup without me, my children. Ah, there you are, Scozzone!"

"O mon Dieu! what is this they tell me, — that some one tried to murder you, master?"

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"Yes, yes, there was something like that."

"Mon Dieu!" cried Scozzone.

"It was nothing, my dear girl, nothing," said Benvenuto consolingly, for poor Catherine had become as pale as death. "Go now and bring wine, of the best, for these gallant fellows. Take the keys of the cellar from Dame Ruperta, Scozzone, and select it yourself."

"Why, you are not going out again?" said Scozzone.

"No, never fear: I am going to find Ascanio in the garden. I have important matters to discuss with him."

Scozzone and the others returned to the studio, and Benvenuto walked toward the gate leading to the garden.

The moon was just rising, and the master saw Ascanio very plainly; but, instead of walking, the young man was climbing a ladder set against the wall between the gardens of the Grand and Petit-Nesle. When he reached the top, he pulled the ladder up after him, lowered it on the other side, and disappeared.

Benvenuto passed his hand over his eyes like a man who cannot believe what he sees. Forming a sudden resolution, he went straight to the foundry and up into his cell, stepped to the window sill, and leaped to the wall of the Petit-Nesle; from there, with the aid of a stout vine, he dropped noiselessly into Colombe's garden; it had rained in the morning, and the ground was so damp that his footfalls were deadened.

He put his ear to the ground, and questioned the silence for some moments. At last he heard subdued voices in the distance, which guided his steps; he at once rose, and crept cautiously forward, feeling his way, and stopping from moment to moment. Soon the voices became more distinct.

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Benvenuto walked toward them, and at last, when he reached the second path which crossed the garden, he recognized Colombe, or rather divined her presence in the shadow, dressed in white, and sitting beside Ascanio on the bench we already know. They were talking in low tones, but distinctly, and with animation.

Hidden from their observation by a clump of trees, Benvenuto drew near and listened.

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III.

AN AUTUMN NIGHT'S DREAM.

It was a beautiful autumn evening, calm and clear. The moon had driven away almost all the clouds, and the few which remained were scattered here and there over the star-strewn sky. Around the group talking and listening in the garden of the Petit-Nesle, everything was calm and silent, but within their hearts all was sadness and agitation.

"My darling Colombe," said Ascanio, while Benvenuto, standing cold and pale behind him, seemed to be listening with his heart rather than with his ears, "my dearest love, why, alas! did our paths meet? When you know all that I have to tell you of misery and horror, you will curse me for being the bearer of such news."

"Nay, my dear," replied Colombe, "whatever you may have to tell me, I shall bless you, for in my eyes you are as one sent by God. I never heard my mother's voice, but I feel that I should have listened to her as I listen to you. Go on, Ascanio, and if you have terrible things to tell me, your voice will at least comfort me a little."

"Summon all your courage and all your strength," said Ascanio.

Thereupon he told her all that had taken place in his presence between Madame d'Etampes and Comte

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d'Orbec; he described the whole plot, a combination of treason against the kingdom and designs upon the honor of an innocent child; he subjected himself to the agony of explaining the infamous bargain made by the treasurer to that ingenuous soul, aghast at this revelation of wickedness; he must needs to make the maiden, whose heart was so pure that she did not blush at his words, understand the cruel refinements of torture and ignominy which hatred and baffled love suggested to the favorite. All that was perfectly clear to Colombe's mind was that her lover was filled with loathing and dismay, and, like the slender vine which has no other support than the sapling to which it clings, she trembled and shuddered with him.

"My dear," she said, "you must make known this fearful plot against my honor to my father. My father does not suspect our love, he owes you his life, and he will listen to you. Oh, never fear! he will rescue me from the clutches of Comte d'Orbec."

"Alas!" was Ascanio's only reply.

"O my love!" cried Colombe, who understood all the apprehension contained in her lover's exclamation. "Oh! can you suspect my father of complicity in so hateful a design? That would be too wicked, Ascanio. No, my father knows nothing, suspects nothing, I am sure, and although he has never shown me any great affection, he would never with his own hand plunge me into shame and misery."

"Forgive me, Colombe," rejoined Ascanio, "but your father is not accustomed to see misery in increased wealth. A title would conceal the shame, and in his courtier-like pride he would deem you happier as a king's mistress than as an artist's wife. It is my duty to hide nothing from you, Colombe: Comte d'Orbec

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told Madame la Duchesse d'Etampes that he would answer for your father."

"Just God, is it possible!" cried the poor girl. "Was such a thing ever seen, Ascanio, as a father who sold his daughter?"

"Such things are seen in all countries and at all times, my poor angel, and more than ever at this time and in this country. Do not picture to yourself the world as fashioned after the image of your heart, or society as taking pattern by your virtue. Yes, Colombe, the noblest names of France have shamelessly farmed out the youth and beauty of their wives and daughters to the royal lust: it is looked upon as a matter of course at court, and your father, if he cares to take the trouble to justify himself, will not lack illustrious precedents. I beg you to forgive me, my beloved, for bringing your chaste and spotless soul so abruptly in contact with this hideous reality; but I cannot avoid the necessity of showing you the snare that is laid for you."

"Ascanio, Ascanio!" cried Colombe, hiding her face against the young man's shoulder; "my father also turns against me. Oh, simply to repeat it kills me with shame! Where can I fly for shelter? Where but to your arms, Ascanio? Yes, it is for you to save me now. Have you spoken to your master, to Benvenuto, who is so strong and great and kindly, judging by your description of him, and whom I love because you love him?"

"Nay, do not love him, do not love him, Colombe!" cried Ascanio.

"Why not?" whispered the girl.

"Because he loves you, because, instead of the friend upon whom we thought we could rely, he is one enemy

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the more we have to contend against: an enemy, you understand, and the most formidable of all our enemies. Listen."

Thereupon he told her how, as he was on the point of making a confidant of Benvenuto, the goldsmith described to him his ideal love, and added that the favorite sculptor of François I. by virtue of the king's word of honor to which he had never proved false, could obtain whatever he chose to ask after the statue of Jupiter was cast. As we know, the boon that Benvenuto proposed to ask was Colombe's hand.

"O God! we have none to look to for succor but thee," said Colombe, raising her white hands and her lovely eyes to heaven. "All our friends are changed to enemies, every haven of refuge becomes a dangerous reef. Are you certain that we are so utterly abandoned?"

"Only too certain," replied Ascanio. "My master is as dangerous to us as your father, Colombe. Yes," he continued, wringing his hands, "I am almost driven to hate him, Benvenuto, my friend, my master, my protector, my father, my God! And yet I ask you, Colombe, why I should bear him ill will? Because he has fallen under the spell to which every exalted mind that comes in contact with yours must yield; because he loves you as I love you. His crime is my own, after all. But you love me, Colombe, and so I am absolved. What shall we do? For two days I have been asking myself the question, and I do not know whether I begin to detest him, or whether I love him still. He loves you, it is true; but he has loved me so dearly, too, that my poor heart wavers and trembles in its perplexity like a reed shaken in the wind. What will he do? First of all, I shall tell him of Comte

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d'Orbec's designs, and I hope that he will deliver us from them. But after that, when we find ourselves face to face as enemies, when I tell him that his pupil is his rival, Colombe, his will, which is omnipotent as fate, will perhaps be as blind; he will forget Ascanio to think only of Colombe; he will turn his eyes away from the man he once loved, to see only the woman he loves, for I feel myself that between him and you I should not hesitate. I feel that I would remorselessly sacrifice my heart's past for its future, earth for heaven! And why should he act differently? he is a man, and to renounce his love would be more than human. We must therefore, fight it out, but how can I, feeble and alone as I am, resist him. But no matter, Colombe: even if I should come some day to hate him I have loved so long and so well, I tell you now that I would not for all the world subject him to the torture he inflicted upon me the other morning when he declared his love for you."

Meanwhile Benvenuto, standing like a statue behind his tree, felt the drops of icy sweat roll down his forehead, and his hand clutched convulsively at his heart.

"Poor Ascanio! dear heart!" returned Colombe, "you have suffered bitterly already, and have much to suffer still. But let us face the future calmly. Let us not exaggerate our griefs, for the prospect is not altogether desperate. Including God there are three of us to make head against misfortune. You would rather see me Benvenuto's wife than Comte d'Orbec's, would you not? But you would also prefer to see me wedded to the Lord than to Benvenuto? Very well! if I am not yours, I will belong to none but the Lord, be sure of that, Ascanio. Your wife in this world, or your

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betrothed in the other. That is my promise to you, Ascanio, and that promise I will keep: never fear."

"Thanks, thou angel from heaven, thanks!" said Ascanio. "Let us forget the great world around us, and concentrate our lives upon this little thicket where we now are. Colombe, you have n't told me yet that you love me. Alas! it would almost seem that you are mine because you could not dō otherwise."

"Hush! Ascanio, hush! do you not see that I am trying to sanctify my happiness by making it a duty? I love you, Ascanio, I love you!"

Benvenuto could no longer find strength to stand; he fell upon his knees with his head against a tree; his haggard eyes were fixed vacantly on space, while, with his ear turned toward the young people, he listened with feverish intentness.

"Dear Colombe," echoed Ascanio, "I love you, and something tells me that we shall be happy, and that the Lord will not abandon the loveliest of all his angels. Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! in this atmosphere of joy which surrounds me, I forget the circle of grief which I must enter when I leave you."

"We must think of to-morrow," said Colombe: "let us help ourselves, Ascanio, so that God may help us. It would be disloyal, I think, to leave your master Benvenuto in ignorance of our love, for he would perhaps incur great risk in contending against Madame d'Etampes and Comte d'Orbec. It would not be fair: you must tell him everything, Ascanio."

"I will obey you, dearest Colombe, for a word from you, as you must know, is law to me. My heart also tells me that you are right, always right. But it will be a terrible blow for him. Alas! I judge from my own heart. It is possible that his love for me may

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turn to hatred, it is possible that he will turn me out of doors. In that case how can I, a stranger, without friends or shelter, resist such powerful enemies as the Duchesse d'Etampes and the king's treasurer. Who will help me to defeat the plans of that terrible couple? Who will fight on my side in this unequal struggle? Who will hold out a helping hand to me?"

"I!" said a deep, grave voice behind them.

"Benvenuto!" cried the apprentice, without even turning round.

Colombe shrieked and sprang to her feet. Ascanio gazed at his master, wavering between affection and wrath.

"Yes, it is I, Benvenuto Cellini," continued the goldsmith, — "I, whom you do not love, mademoiselle, — I, whom you no longer love, Ascanio, and who come to save you both, nevertheless."

"What do you say?" cried Ascanio.

"I say that you must come and sit down again, here by my side, for we must understand one another. You have no need to tell me aught. I have not lost a word of your conversation. Forgive me for listening after I came upon you by chance, but you understand: it is much better that I should know all. You have said some things very sad and terrible for me to hear; but some kind things too. Ascanio was sometimes right and sometimes wrong. It is very true, Mademoiselle, that I would have disputed you with him. But since you love him, that's the end of it, be happy; he has forbidden you to love me, but I will force you to it by giving you to him."

"Dear master!" cried Ascanio.

"You suffer, monsieur, do you not?" said Colombe, clasping her hands.

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"Ah, thanks, thanks!" said Benvenuto, as his eyes filled with tears, but restraining his feelings with a mighty effort. "You see that I suffer. He would not have noticed it, ungrateful boy! But nothing escapes a woman's eyes. Yes, I will not tell you a falsehood; I do suffer! and why not, since you are lost to me? But at the same time I am happy, because I am able to serve you; you will owe everything to me, and that thought comforts me a little. You were wrong, Ascanio; my Beatrice is jealous, and will brook no rival; you, Ascanio, must finish the statue of Hebe. Adieu, my sweetest dream, — the last!"

Benvenuto spoke with effort, in a broken voice. Colombe leaned gracefully toward him, and put her hand in his.

"Weep, my friend, weep," she said softly.

"Yes, yes," said Cellini, bursting into tears.

He stood for some time without speaking, weeping bitterly, and trembling with emotion from head to foot. His forceful nature gladly sought relief in tears too long held back. Ascanio and Colombe looked on in respectful silence at this exhibition of bitter grief.

"Except on the day when I wounded you, Ascanio, except at the moment when I saw your blood flow, I have not wept for twenty years," he said at last, recovering his self-control; "but it has been a hard blow to me. I was in such agony just now behind those trees that I was tempted for a moment to plunge my dagger in my heart, and end it all. The only thing that held my hand was your need of me, and so you saved my life. All is as it should be, after all. Ascanio has twenty years more of happiness to give you than I have, Colombe. And then he is my child: you will be very happy together, and it will rejoice my father's

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heart. Benvenuto will succeed in triumphing over Benvenuto himself, as well as over his enemies. It is the lot of us creators to suffer, and perhaps each one of my tears will cause some lovely statue to spring up, as each of Dante's tears became a sublime strain. You see, Colombe, I am already returning to my old love, my cherished sculpture: that love will never forsake me. You did well to bid me weep: all the bitterness has been washed from my heart by my tears. I am sad still, but I am kind once more, and I will forget my pain in my efforts to save you."

Ascanio took one of the master's hands, and pressed it warmly in his own. Colombe took the other, and put it to her lips. Benvenuto breathed more heavily than he had yet done. Shaking his head, he said with a smile: —

"Do not make it harder for me, but spare me, my children. It will be better never to speak of this again. Henceforth, Colombe, I will be your friend, nothing more; I will be your father. The rest is all a dream. Now let us talk of the danger which threatens you, and of what we are to do. I overheard you a moment since discussing your plans. Mon Dieu! you are very young, and neither of you has an idea of what life really is. You offer yourselves, in the innocence of your heart, to the cruel blows of destiny, unarmed, and you hope to vanquish malignity, avarice, all the vile passions of which man is capable with your kind hearts and your smiles! Dear fools! I will be strong and cunning and implacable in your stead. I am wonted to it, but you, — God created you for happiness and tranquillity, my lovely cherubs, and I will see to it that you fulfil your destiny.

"Ascanio, anger shall not furrow thy calm brow:

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grief, Colombe, shall not disturb the pure outlines of thy face. I will take you in my arms, soft-eyed, charming pair; I will bear you so through all the mire and misery of life, and will not set you down until you have arrived safe and sound at perfect joy; and then I 'll gaze at you, and be happy in your happiness. But you must have blind confidence in me; I have my own peculiar ways, abrupt and hard to understand, and which may perhaps alarm you a little, Colombe. I conduct myself somewhat after the manner of artillery, and I go straight to my goal, heedless of what I may meet on the road. Yes, I think more of the purity of my intentions, I confess, than of the morality of the means I use. When I set about modelling a beautiful figure I care but little whether the clay soils my fingers. The figure finished, I wash my hands, and that 's the end of it. Do you then, mademoiselle, with your refined and timorous heart, leave me to answer to God for my acts. He and I understand each other. I have a powerful combination to deal with. The count is ambitious, the provost avaricious, and the duchess very subtle. They are each and all very powerful. You are in their power, and in their hands, and two of them have rights over you: it may perhaps be necessary to resort to craft and violence. I shall arrange it, however, so that you and Ascanio will have no part in a contest in every way beneath you. Come, Colombe, are you ready to close your eyes, and allow yourself to be led? When I say, 'Do this,' will you do it? — 'Remain there,' will you remain? — 'Go,' will you go?"

"What does Ascanio say?" asked Colombe.

"Colombe," returned the apprentice, "Benvenuto is great and good: he loves us and forgives the injury we have done him. Let us obey him, I implore you."

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"Command me, master," said Colombe, "and I will obey you as if you were sent by God himself.

"Very well, my child. I have but one thing more to ask you; it will cost you dear, perhaps, but you must make up your mind to it; thereafter your part will be confined to waiting, and allowing circumstances and myself to do our work. In order that both of you may have more perfect faith in me, and that you may confide unhesitatingly in one whose life may not be unspotted, but whose heart has remained pure, I am about to tell you the story of my youth. All stories resemble one another, alas! and sorrow lies at the heart of every one. Ascanio, I propose to tell you how my Beatrice, the angel of whom I have spoken to you, came to be associated with my existence; you shall know who she was, and you will wonder less no doubt at my determination to abandon Colombe to you, when you realize that by that sacrifice I am but beginning to pay to the child the debt I owe the mother. Your mother! a saint in paradise, Ascanio! Beatrice would say blessed; Stefana would say crowned."

"You have always told me, master, that you would tell me your whole story some day."

"Yes, and the moment has come to redeem my promise. You will have even more confidence in me, Colombe, when you know all the reasons I have for loving our Ascanio."

Thereupon Benvenuto took a hand of each of his children in his own, and told them what follows, in his grave, melodious voice, beneath the glimmering stars in the peaceful silence of the night.

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IV.

STEFANA.

"TWENTY years since, I was twenty years old, as you are now, Ascanio, and I was at work with a Florentine goldsmith named Raphael del Moro. He was a good workman and did not lack taste; but he cared more for rest than for work, allowing himself to be inveigled into attending parties with disheartening facility, and, although he had little money, himself leading astray those who were in his studio. Very often I was left alone in the house, singing over some piece of work I had in hand. In those days I sang as Scozzone does. All the sluggards in the city came as a matter of course to Master Raphael for employment, or rather in quest of pleasure, for he had the reputation of being too weak ever to quarrel. One grows rich slowly with such habits as his; so he was always hard up, and soon came to be the most discredited goldsmith in Florence.

"I am wrong. He had a confrère who had even less custom than he, although he was of a noble family. But it was not for irregularity in meeting his obligations that Gismondo Gaddi was cried down, but for his notorious lack of talent and his sordid avarice. As everything intrusted to him left his hands imperfect or spoiled, and not a customer, unless he happened to be a stranger, ventured into his shop, Gismondo undertook to earn his living by usury, and to loan money at enor-

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mous interest to young men desirous of discounting their future prospects. This profession succeeded better than the other, as Gaddi always demanded good security, and went into nothing without reliable guaranties. With that exception, he was, as he himself said, very considerate and long-suffering; he loaned to everybody, compatriots and foreigners, Jews and Christians. He would have loaned to St. Peter upon the keys of paradise, or to Satan upon his estates in hell.

"Need I say that he loaned to my poor Raphael del Moro, who consumed every day his provision for the morrow, but whose sterling integrity never wavered. Their constant connection in business, and the social ostracism to which both were subjected, tended to bring the two goldsmiths together. Del Moro was deeply grateful for his confrère's untiring amiability in the matter of advancing money. Gaddi thoroughly esteemed an honest and accommodating debtor. They were, in a word, the best friends in the world, and Gismondo would not have missed for an empire one of the parties with which Del Moro regaled him.

"Del Moro was a widower, but he had a daughter of sixteen, named Stefana. From a sculptor's point of view Stefana was not beautiful, and yet her appearance was most striking. Beneath her forehead, which was almost too high and not smooth enough for a woman, one could see her brain at work, so to speak. Her great, moist eyes, of a velvety black hue, moved you to respect and deep emotion as they rested upon you. An ivory pallor overspread her face, which was lightened by a melancholy yet charming expression, like the faint sunshine of an autumn morning. I forget a crown of luxurious raven locks, and hands a queen might have envied.

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"Stefana ordinarily stood bending slightly forward, like a lily swayed by the wind. You might at times have taken her for a statue of Melancholy. When she stood erect, when her lovely eyes sparkled, when her nostrils dilated, when her arm was outstretched to emphasize a command, you would have adored her as the Archangel Gabriel. She resembled you, Ascanio, but you have less weakness of resolution and capacity for suffering. The immortality of the soul was never more clearly revealed to my eyes than in that slender, graceful body. Del Moro, who feared his daughter almost as much as he loved her, was accustomed to say that he had consigned to the tomb only the body of his wife, that Stefana was her dead mother's soul.

"I was at this time an adventurous youth, an impulsive giddy-pated creature. I loved liberty before everything. I was bubbling over with life, and I expended my surplus energy in foolish quarrels and foolish love affairs. I worked nevertheless with no less passion than I put into my pleasures, and despite my vagaries I was Raphael's best workman, and the only one in the establishment who earned any money. But what I did well, I did by instinct, almost by chance. I had studied the ancients to good purpose. For whole days I had gazed upon the bas-reliefs and statues of Athens and Rome, making studies with pencil and chisel, and constant contact with these sublime artists of former days gave me purity and precision of outline; but I was simply a successful imitator; I did not create. Still, I say again, I was incontestably and easily the cleverest and most hardworking of Del Moro's comrades. I have since learned that the master's secret wish was that I should marry his daughter.

"But I was thinking little of settling down; i' faith,

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I was enamored of independence, freedom from care, and an outdoor life. I was absent from the workshop whole days at a time. I would return completely overdone with fatigue, and yet in a few hours I would have overtaken and passed Raphael's other workmen. I would fight for a word, fall in love at a glance. A fine husband I should have made!

"Moreover, my feelings when I was with Stefana in no wise resembled those aroused by the pretty girls of Porta del Prato or Borgo Pinti. She almost overawed me; if I had been told that I loved her otherwise than as an elder sister I should have laughed. When I returned from one of my escapades I dared not look Stefana in the face. She was more than stern, she was sad. On the other hand, when fatigue or a praiseworthy zealous impulse had detained me at home, I always sought Stefana's companionship, her sweet face, and her sweet voice; my affection for her had in it something serious and sacred, which I did not at the time fully understand, but which was very pleasant to me. Very often, amid my wildest excesses, the thought of Stefana would pass through my mind, and my companions would ask me why I had suddenly become thoughtful. Sometimes, when I was in the act of drawing my sword or my dagger, I would pronounce her name as it were that of my patron saint, and I noticed that whenever that occurred I retired from the contest unhurt. But this tender feeling for the dear child, innocent, lovely, and affectionate as she was, lay dormant at the bottom of my heart as in a sanctuary.

"For her part, it is certain, that she was as full of indulgence and kindly feeling for me as she was cold and dignified with my slothful comrades. She sometimes came to sit in the studio beside her father, and I

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would sometimes feel her eyes fixed on my face as she bent over my work. I was proud and happy in her preference, although I did not explain my feeling to myself. If one of my comrades indulged in a little vulgar flattery, and informed me that my master's daughter was in love with me, I received his insolence so wrathfully that he never repeated it.

"An accident which befell Stefana proved to me how deeply she had become rooted in my heart.

"One day when she was in the studio looking at a piece of work, she did not take away her little white hand quickly enough, and a bungling workman, who was tipsy, I think, struck the little finger and the finger beside it with his chisel. The poor child shrieked at first, then, as if ashamed of it, smiled to reassure us, but her hand as she held it up was covered with blood. I think I should have killed the fellow had my mind not been concentrated upon her.

"Gismondo Gaddi, who was present, said that he knew a surgeon in the neighborhood, and ran to fetch him. The villanous medicaster dressed the wound, and came every day to see Stefana; but he was so ignorant and careless that gangrene set in. Thereupon the ass pompously declared that, despite his efforts, Stefana's right arm would always be paralyzed.

"Raphael del Moro was in too straitened circumstances to be able to consult another physician; but when I heard the imbecile announce his decision, I refused to abide by it. I hurried to my room, emptied the purse which contained all my savings, and ran off to Giacomo Rastelli of Perouse, the Pope's surgeon, and the most eminent practitioner in all Italy. At my earnest entreaty, and as the sum I offered him was by no means contemptible, he came at once, exclaiming, 'O these

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lovers!' After examining the wound, he announced that he would answer for it that Stefana would be able to use the right arm as well as the other within a fortnight. I longed to embrace the worthy man. He set about dressing the poor maimed fingers, and Stefana was at once relieved. But a day or two later it was necessary to remove the decayed bone.

"She asked me to be present at the operation to give her courage, whereas I was entirely lacking in it myself, and my heart felt very small in my breast. Master Giacomo made use of some great instrument which caused Stefana terrible pain. She could not restrain her groans, which echoed in my heart. My temples were bathed in a cold perspiration.

"At last the torture exceeded my strength; the cruel tool which tortured those poor, delicate fingers tortured me no less. I rose, begging Master Giacomo to suspend the operation, and to wait for me a quarter of an hour.

"I went down to the studio, and there, as if inspired by my good genius, I made an instrument of thin, sharp steel which would cut like a razor. I returned to the surgeon, who with that operated so gently and easily that the dear girl felt almost no pain. In five minutes it was all over, and a fortnight later she gave me the hand to kiss, which, as she said, I had preserved.

"But it would be impossible for me to describe the poignant emotion I passed through when I saw the suffering of my poor Résignée, as I sometimes called her.

"Resignation was, in truth, the natural condition of her mind. Stefana was not happy; her father's improvidence and recklessness distressed her beyond measure; her only consolation was religion; like all unhappy women she was pious. Very often, as I

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entered some church to pray, for I have always loved God, I would spy Stefana in a corner weeping and praying.

"Whenever, as too frequently happened, Master Del Moro's reckless extravagance left her penniless, she would appeal to me with a simple, trustful confidence, which went to my heart. She would say, dear girl, with the simplicity characteristic of noble hearts: 'Benvenuto, I beg you to pass the night at work, to finish that reliquary, or that ewer, for we have no money at all.'

"I soon adopted the habit of submitting to her every piece of work that I completed, and she would point out its imperfections and advise me with extraordinary sagacity. Solitude and sorrow had inspired and elevated her mind more than one would think possible. Her words, which were at once innocent and profound, taught me more than one secret of my art, and often opened new possibilities to my mind.

"I remember one day when I showed her a medal which I was engraving for a cardinal, and which had a representation of the cardinal's head on one side, and on the other Jesus walking on the sea, and holding out his hand to St. Peter, with this legend: '*Quare dubitasti?*' Wherefore didst thou doubt?

"Stefana was well pleased with the portrait, which was a very good likeness, and very well executed. She looked at the reverse in silence for a long while.

"'The face of Our Lord is very beautiful,' she said at last, 'and if it were intended for Apollo or Jupiter I should find nothing to criticise. But Jesus is something more than beautiful; Jesus is divine. The lines of this face are superb in their purity, but where is the soul? I admire the man, but I look in vain for the

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God. Consider, Benvenuto, that you are not an artist simply, but a Christian as well. My heart, you know, has often bled; that is to say, alas! my heart has often doubted; and I, too, have shaken off my depression when I saw Jesus holding out his hand to me, and have heard the sublime words, "Wherefore hast thou doubted?" Ah, Benvenuto, your image of him is less beautiful than he. In his celestial countenance there was the sadness of the afflicted father, and the clemency of the king who pardons. His forehead shone, but his mouth smiled; he was more than great, he was good.'

"'Wait a moment, Stefana,' said I.

"I effaced what I had done, and in a few moments I once more began upon the Savior's face under her eyes.

"'Is that better?' I asked, as I handed it to her.

"'Oh yes!' she replied, with tears in her eyes; 'so our blessed Lord appeared to me when I was heavy-hearted. Yes, I recognize him now by his expression of compassion and majesty. Ah, Benvenuto! I advise you always henceforth to follow this course: before taking the wax in hand, be sure of the thought; you possess the instrument, master the expression; you have the material part, seek the spiritual part; let your fingers never be aught but the servants of your mind.'

"Such was the counsel given me by that child of sixteen, in her sublime good sense. When I was alone I reflected upon what she had said to me, and realized that she was right. Thus did she guide and enlighten my instinct. Having the form in my mind, I sought the idea, and to combine the form and the idea in such wise that they would issue from my hands a perfectly blended whole, as Minerva came forth all armed from the brain of Jupiter.

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"Mon Dieu! how lovely is youth, and how its memories do overpower one! Ascanio, Colombe, this lovely evening we are passing together reminds me of all those I passed by Stefana's side sitting upon a bench outside her father's house. She would gaze up at the sky, and I would gaze at her. It was twenty years ago, but it seems only yesterday; I put out my hand and fancy that I can feel hers, but it is yours, my children; what God does is well done.

"Oh, simply to see her in her white dress was to feel tranquillity steal over my soul! Often when we parted we had not uttered a word, and yet I carried away from those silent interviews all sorts of fine and noble thoughts, which made me better and greater.

"But all this had an end, as all happiness in this world has.

"Raphael del Moro had but little farther to go to reach the lowest depths of destitution. He owed his kind neighbor Gismondo Gaddi two thousand ducats, which he knew not how to pay. The thought drove this honest man to desperation. He wished at least to save his daughter, and intrusted his purpose to give her to me to one of the workmen, doubtless that he might broach the subject to me. But he was one of the idiots whom I had lost my temper with when they threw Stefana's sisterly affection at my head as a reproach. The blockhead did not even allow Raphael to finish.

"'Abandon that scheme, Master Del Moro,' he said; 'the suggestion would not be favorably received, my word for it.'

"The goldsmith was proud: he believed that I despised him on account of his poverty, and he never referred to the subject again.

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"Some time after, Gismondo Gaddi came to demand payment of his debt, and when Raphael asked for more time,

"'Hark ye,' said Gismondo, 'give me your daughter's hand, and I will give you a receipt in full.'

"Del Moro was transported with joy. To be sure Gaddi had the reputation of being a little covetous, a little high-tempered, and a little jealous, but he was rich, and what the poor esteem and envy most, alas! is wealth. When Raphael mentioned this unexpected proposition to his daughter, she made no reply; but that evening, as we left the bench where we had been sitting together, to return to the house, she said to me, 'Benvenuto, Gismondo Gaddi has asked my hand in marriage, and my father has given his consent.'

"With those simple words she left me. I leaped to my feet, and in a sort of frenzy I went out of the city and wandered about over the fields. Throughout the night, now running like a madman, and again lying at full length upon the grass and weeping, a myriad of mad, desperate, frenzied thoughts chased one another through my disordered brain.

"'She, Stefana, the wife of that odious Gismondo!' I said to myself, when I had in some degree recovered my self-control, and was seeking to collect my wits. 'The thought overpowers me and terrifies me as well, and as she would certainly prefer me, she makes a mute appeal to my friendship, to my jealousy. Ah, yes! I am jealous, furiously jealous; but have I the right to be? Gaddi is morose and violent tempered, but let us be just to one another. What woman would be happy with me? Am I not brutal, capricious, restless, forever involved in dangerous quarrels and unholy intrigues? Could I conquer myself? No, never; so long as the

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blood boils in my veins as at present, I shall always have my hand on my dagger, and my foot outside the house.

" 'Poor Stefana! I should make her weep and suffer, I should see her lose color and pine away. I should hate myself, and should soon come to hate her as well, as a living reproach. She would die, and I should have her death to answer for. No, I am not made — alas! I feel that I am not — for calm, peaceful family joys; I must have liberty, space, conflict, anything rather than the peace and monotony of happiness. I should break in my grasp that fragile, delicate flower. I should torture that dear, loving heart by my insults, and my own existence, my own heart would be blighted by remorse. But would she be happier with this Gismondo Gaddi? Why should she marry him? We were so happy together. After all, Stefana must know that an artist's instincts and temperament do not easily accommodate themselves to the rigid bonds, the commonplace necessities of family life. I must say farewell to all my dreams of glory, renounce the thought of making my name famous, and abandon art, which thrives on liberty and power. How can one create when held a prisoner at the domestic fireside? Say, O Dante Alighieri! O Michel-Angelo, my master, how you would laugh to see your pupil rocking his children to sleep, and asking his wife's pardon! No, I will be brave in my own behalf, and generous to Stefana: sad and alone I will dream out my dream and fulfil my destiny.'

" You see, my children, that I make myself no better than I am. There was some selfishness in my decision, but there was also much deep and sincere affection for Stefana, and my raving seemed to border closely on common sense.

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"The next morning I returned to the workshop in a reasonably tranquil frame of mind. Stefana also seemed calm, but she was paler than usual. A month passed thus. One evening Stefana said, as we parted, —

"'In a week, Benvenuto, I shall be Gismondo Gaddi's wife.'

"As she did not leave me at once, I had time to look at her. She stood with her hand on her heart, bending beneath her burden of sorrow, and her sweet smile was sad enough to make one weep. She gazed at me with a sorrowful expression, but without the least indication of reproach. It seemed to me as if my angel, ready to leave earth behind, was saying farewell to me. She stood thus, mute and motionless, for a moment, then entered the house.

"I was destined never to see her more in this world.

"This time again I left the city bareheaded and running like a madman; but I did not return the next day, or the next; I kept on until I reached Rome.

"I remained at Rome five years; I laid the foundation of my reputation, I won the friendship of the Pope, I had duels and love affairs and artistic success, but I was not contented, — something was lacking. Amid my engrossing occupations I never passed a day without turning my eyes toward Florence. There was no night when I did not see in my dreams Stefana, pale-faced and sad, standing in the doorway of her father's house, and gazing at me.

"After five years I received a letter from Florence, sealed with black. I read and reread it so many times that I know it now by heart.

"It ran thus: —

"'Benvenuto, I am dying. Benvenuto, I loved you.

"'Listen to the dreams I dreamed. I knew you as

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well as I knew myself. I foresaw the power that is in you, and that will make you great some day. Your genius, which I read upon your broad forehead, in your ardent glance and your passionate gestures, would impose grave duties on her who should bear your name. I was ready to undertake them. Happiness had for me the solemnity of a divine mission. I would not have been your wife, Benvenuto, I would have been your friend, your sister, your mother. Your noble existence belongs to all mankind, I know, and I would have assumed no other right than that of diverting you in your ennui, of uplifting you in your moments of depression. You would have been free, my friend, always and everywhere. Alas! I had long since become accustomed to your lamentable absences from home, to all the exactions of your impulsive nature, to all the whims of your tempest-loving heart. Every powerful temperament has pressing needs. The longer the eagle has soared aloft, the longer he is obliged to rest on earth. But when you had torn yourself free from the feverish dreams of your genius, I would have found once more at the awakening my sublime Benvenuto, whom I love so dearly, and who would have belonged to me alone! I would never have reproached you for the hours of neglect, for they would have contained no insult for me. For my own part, knowing you to be jealous, as is every noble heart, jealous as the God of Holy Writ, I would have remained in seclusion when you were away, in the solitude which I love, awaiting your return and praying for you.

"'Such would my life have been.

"'But when I saw that you abandoned me, I bowed submissively to God's will and yours, closed my eyes, and placed my fate in the hands of duty. My father

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ordered me to enter into a marriage which would save him from dishonor, and I obeyed. My husband has been harsh, stern, pitiless; he has not been content with my docile submission, but demanded a love beyond my power to give, and punished me brutally for my involuntary sadness. I resigned myself to endure everything. I have been, I trust, a pure and dignified spouse, but always very sad at heart, Benvenuto. God has rewarded me, however, even in this world, by giving me a son. My child's kisses have for four years past prevented me from feeling insults, blows, and last of all poverty! for my husband ruined himself trying to gain too much, and he died last month from chagrin at his ruin. May God forgive him as I do!

"'I shall be dead myself within the hour, dead from the effects of my accumulated suffering, and I bequeath my son to you, Benvenuto.

"'Perhaps all is for the best. Who can say if my womanly weakness would have been equal to the task I would have undertaken with you. He, my Ascanio, — he is like me, — will be a stronger and more submissive companion for you; he will love you better, if not more dearly. I am not jealous of him.

"'Do for my child what I would have done for you.

"'Adieu, my friend. I loved you and I love you still, and I tell you without shame or remorse, at the very doors of eternity, for my love was holy. Adieu! be great, and I shall be happy: raise your eyes sometimes to heaven that I may see you.

"'Your STEFANA.'

"Now, Colombe and Ascanio, will you have confidence in me, and are you ready to do what I advise?"

The young people replied with a single exclamation.

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V.

DOMICILIARY VISITS.

On the day following that on which this story was told in the garden of the Petit-Nesle, by the moon's pale light, Benvenuto's studio wore its accustomed aspect. The master was working at the gold salt dish, the material for which he had so valiantly defended against the four bravos, who strove to take it from him, and his life with it. Ascanio was chiselling Madame d'Etampes's lily; Jacques Aubry, reclining lazily on a lounging-chair, was putting question after question to Cellini, who paid no attention to him, and imposed upon the inquisitive student the necessity of framing his own replies. Pagolo was gazing at Catherine, who was busy with some woman's work. Hermann and the others were filing, welding, chiselling, and Scozzone's joyous singing furnished the element of cheerfulness in this tranquil, busy scene.

The Petit-Nesle was by no means so tranquil, for Colombe had disappeared.

There all was excitement and apprehension; they were seeking her everywhere, and calling her name. Dame Perrine was shrieking at the top of her voice, and the provost, who had been sent for in hot haste, was trying to lay hold upon something, in the midst of the good woman's lamentations, which might put him on the track of the absent one, who was in all probability a fugitive.

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"Look you, Dame Perrine; do you say that you last saw her a few moments after I went away last night?" demanded the provost.

"Alas! yes, messire. Jésus Dieu! what a misfortune! The poor, dear child seemed a bit cast down as she went to take off all her beautiful court fixings. She put on a simple white dress — saints in Paradise, have pity on us! — and then she said to me, 'Dame Perrine, it's a lovely evening, and I will go and take a turn or two in my path.' It might have been about seven o'clock. Madame here," added Perrine, pointing to Pulchérie, the woman who had been installed as her assistant or superior, — "Madame here had already gone to her room, doubtless to work at those lovely dresses which she makes so well, and I was at work sewing in the room below. I don't know how long I remained there, — it is possible that after a while my poor tired eyes closed in spite of me, and that I lost myself a moment."

"As usual," interposed Pulchérie sharply.

"At all events," continued Dame Perrine, not deigning to reply to this insidious slander, "about ten o'clock I left my chair and went to the garden to see if Colombe had not forgotten herself. I called and found no one: I supposed then that she had gone to her own room and to bed without disturbing me, as the dear child has done a thousand times. Merciful Heaven! who would have thought — Ah! Messire le Prévôt, I can safely say that she followed no lover, but some ravisher. I reared her in the way — "

"And this morning," the provost broke in impatiently, "this morning?"

"This morning when I found that she didn't come down — Holy Virgin help us!"

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"To the devil with your litanies!" cried Messire d'Estourville. "Say what you have to say simply and without all these jeremiads. This morning?"

"Ah! Monsieur le Prévôt, you can't prevent my weeping until she is found. This morning, messire, being alarmed at not seeing her (she is always so early!) I knocked at her door to wake her, and, as she did not answer, I opened the door. No one. The bed was not even rumpled, messire. With that I called and cried, and lost my head, and you want me not to weep!"

"Dame Perrine," said the provost sternly; "have you admitted any one here during my absence?"

"I admit any one! the idea!" rejoined the governess with every indication of stupefaction, feeling a little conscience-stricken in that regard. "Did n't you forbid me, messire? Since when, pray, have I allowed myself to disobey your orders? Admit some one? Oh yes, of course!"

"This Benvenuto, for instance, who had the assurance to deem my daughter so fair; has he never tried to buy you?"

"Good lack! he would have been more likely to try to fly to the moon. I would have received him prettily, I promise you."

"I am to understand, then, that you have never admitted a man, a young man, to the Petit-Nesle?"

"A young man! Merciful Heaven! a young man! Why not the devil himself?"

"Pray who is the handsome boy," said Pulchérie, "who has knocked at the door at least ten times since I have been here, and in whose face I have shut the door as often?"

"A handsome boy? Your sight must be poor, my dear, unless it was Comte d'Orbec. Ah, bon Dieu!

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I know: you may mean Ascanio. You know Ascanio, Messire? the young fellow who saved your life. Yes, I did give him my shoe-buckles to repair. But he, that apprentice! Wear glasses, my love! May these walls and pavements speak, if they ever saw him here!"

"Enough," interposed the provost severely. "If you have betrayed my confidence, Dame Perrine, I swear that you shall pay me for it! I am going now to this Benvenuto; God knows how the clown will receive me, but go I must."

Contrary to his expectation Benvenuto received the provost with perfect civility. In the face of his cool and easy manner and his good humor, Messire d'Estourville did not dare mention his suspicions. But he said that his daughter, having been unnecessarily alarmed the evening before, had fled in her panic terror like a mad girl; that it was possible that she might have taken refuge in the Grand-Nesle without Benvenuto's knowledge, — or else that she might have fainted somewhere in the grounds as she was passing through. In short, he lied in the most bungling way imaginable.

But Cellini courteously accepted all his fables and all his excuses; indeed, he was so obliging as to appear to notice nothing out of the way. He did more, he sympathized with the provost with all his heart, declaring that he would be happy to assist in restoring his daughter to a father who had always hedged her around with such touching affection. To hear him, one might suppose the fugitive was very much in the wrong, and could not too soon return to so pleasant a home and so loving a parent. Moreover, to prove the sincerity of his interest in Messire d'Estourville's affliction, he

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placed himself at his disposal to assist him in his search in the Grand-Nesle and elsewhere.

The provost, half convinced, and the more deeply affected by these eulogiums, in that he knew in his heart that he did not deserve them, began a careful search of his former property, of which he knew all the ins and outs. There was not a door that he did not open, not a wardrobe nor a chest into which he did not peer, as if by inadvertence. Having inspected every nook and corner of the hotel itself, he went into the garden, and searched the arsenal, foundry, stables and cellar, scrutinizing everything most rigorously. Benvenuto, faithful to his first offer, accompanied him throughout his investigations, and assisted him to the utmost of his ability, offering him all the keys, and calling his attention to this or that corridor or closet which the provost overlooked. He advised him to leave one of his people on guard in each spot as he left it, lest the fugitive should evade him by stealing from place to place.

Having continued his perquisitions for two hours to no purpose, Messire d'Estourville, feeling sure that he had omitted nothing, and overwhelmed by his host's politeness, left the Grand-Nesle, with profuse thanks and apologies to its master.

"Whenever it suits your pleasure to return," said the goldsmith, "and if you desire to renew your investigations here, my house is open to you at all times, as when it was your own. Indeed it is your right, messire; did we not sign a treaty whereby we agreed to live on neighborly terms?"

The provost thanked Benvenuto, and as he knew not how to return his courtesy, he loudly praised, as he went away, the colossal statue of Mars, which the artist was at work upon, as we have said. Benvenuto

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led him around it, and complacently called his attention to its amazing proportions; it was more than sixty feet high and nearly twenty in circumference at its base.

Messire d'Estourville withdrew much dejected. As he had failed to find his daughter in the precincts of the Grand-Nesle, he was convinced that she had found shelter somewhere in the city. But even at that time the city was sufficiently large to make his own task as chief officer of the police an embarrassing one. Then, too, there was this question to be solved. Had she been kidnapped, or had she fled? Was she the victim of some other person's violence, or had she yielded to her own impulse? There was nothing to set at rest his uncertainty upon this point. He hoped that in the first event she would succeed in escaping, and in the second would return of her own volition. He therefore waited with what patience he could muster, none the less questioning Dame Perrine twenty times a day, who passed her time calling upon the saints in paradise, and swearing by all the gods that she had admitted no one; and indeed she was no more suspicious than Messire d'Estourville himself of Ascanio.

That day and the next passed without news. The provost thereupon put all his agents in the field: a thing he had hitherto omitted to do, in order that the unfortunate occurrence, in which his reputation was so deeply interested, might not be noised abroad. To be sure he simply gave them Colombe's description, without giving them her name, and their investigations were made upon an entirely different pretext from the real one. But although he resorted to all his secret sources of information, all their searching was without result.

Surely he had never been an affectionate or gentle father, but if he was not in despair, he was in a bad

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temper, and his pride suffered if his heart did not. He thought indignantly of the fine match which the little fool would perhaps miss by reason of this escapade, and with furious rage of the witticisms and sarcasms with which his misadventure would be greeted at court.

He had to make up his mind at last to confide his woful tale to Comte d'Orbec. Colombe's *fiancé* was grieved by the news, in the same way as a merchant is grieved who learns that part of his cargo has been jettisoned, and not otherwise. He was a philosopher, was the dear count, and promised his worthy friend that, if the affair did not make too much noise, the marriage should come off none the less; and, as he was a man who knew how to strike when the iron was hot, he seized the opportunity to whisper to the provost a few words as to the plans of Madame d'Etampes regarding Colombe.

The provost was dazzled at the honor which might be in store for him: his anger redoubled, and he cursed the ungrateful girl who was ruining her own chances of such a noble destiny. We spare our readers the details of the conversation between the two old courtiers to which this avowal of Comte d'Orbec led; we will say simply that grief and hope were combined therein in a curiously touching way. As misfortune brings men together, the prospective father-in-law and son-in-law parted more closely united than ever, and without making up their minds to renounce the brilliant prospects of which they had caught a glimpse.

They agreed to keep the occurrence secret from everybody; but the Duchesse d'Etampes was too intimate a friend, and too deeply interested as an accomplice, not to be let into their confidence. It was a wise move on their part, for she took the thing much more to heart than the father and husband had done, and, as we know,

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she was better qualified than any other to give the provost information and direct his search.

She knew of Ascanio's love for Colombe, and she had herself forced him, so to speak, to listen to the whole conspiracy. The young man, realizing that a blow was to be aimed at the honor of his beloved, had perhaps resolved upon some desperate act. But Ascanio had himself told her that Colombe did not love him, and not loving him she would be unlikely to lend herself to such a design. Now the Duchesse d'Etampes knew him upon whom her suspicion first fell sufficiently well to be sure that he would never have the courage to defy his mistress's scorn and her resistance; and yet, despite all her reasoning, and although in her eyes all the probabilities pointed to Ascanio's innocence, her jealous instinct told her that Colombe must be sought at the Hôtel de Nesle, and that they must make sure of Ascanio before everything.

But, on the other hand, Madame d'Etampes could not tell her friends the source of that conviction, for she must in that case confess her love for Ascanio, and that, in the imprudence of her passion, she had made known to him all her designs upon Colombe. She simply said to them that she would be very much mistaken if Benvenuto were not the culprit, Ascanio his accomplice, and the Grand-Nesle the place of concealment. To no purpose did the provost argue with her, and swear that he had inspected and searched every corner, she would not yield her point, saying that she had her reasons for the faith that was in her, and she was so obstinate in her opinion that she ended by arousing suspicion in the mind of Messire d'Estourville, who was certain nevertheless that he had made a thorough search.

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"However," said the duchess, "I will send for Ascanio, I will see him and question him myself, never fear."

"O madame! you are too kind," said the provost.

"And you too stupid," muttered the duchess between her teeth. She dismissed them, and set about reflecting upon the method she should adopt to induce the young man to come to her; but before she had decided upon any, Ascanio was announced; it was as if he had anticipated her wish.

He was cold and calm. The gaze with which Madame d'Etampes received him was so piercing that you would have said she wished to read to the very bottom of his heart; but Ascanio did not seem to notice it.

"Madame," said he, as he saluted her, "I have come to show you your lily, which is almost finished; almost nothing is lacking to complete it save the two hundred thousand crown dewdrop you promised to furnish me."

"Very well! and your Colombe?" was the only reply vouchsafed by Madame d'Etampes.

"If you mean Mademoiselle d'Estourville, madame," rejoined Ascanio gravely, "I will beg you on my knees not to pronounce her name again before me. Yes, madame, I most humbly and earnestly implore you that this subject may never be mentioned between us, in pity's name!"

"Aha! spite!" said the duchess, who did not remove her penetrating gaze from Ascanio's face for an instant.

"Whatever the feeling which influences me, madame, and though I were to be disgraced in your eyes, I shall venture to decline hereafter to talk with you upon this subject. I have sworn a solemn oath that everything connected with that memory shall be dead and buried in my heart."

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"Am I mistaken?" thought the duchess; "and has Ascanio no part in this transaction? Can it be that the child has followed some other adorer, voluntarily or perforce, and, although lost to my ambitious schemes, has served the interests of my passion by her flight?"

Having indulged in these reflections beneath her breath, she continued, aloud: —

"Ascanio, you beg me not to speak of her again, but you will at least allow me to speak of yourself. You see that in obedience to your entreaty I do not insist, but who knows if this second subject will not be even more disagreeable to you than the first? Who knows —"

"Forgive me for interrupting you, madame," said the young man, "but your kindness in granting me the favor I ask emboldens me to ask another. Although of noble birth, I am simply a poor, obscure youth, reared in the gloom of a goldsmith's workshop, and from that artistic cloister I am suddenly transported to a brilliant sphere, involved in the destiny of empires, and, weak creature that I am, having powerful noblemen for enemies, and a king for rival. And such a king, madame! François I., one of the most powerful princes in Christendom! I have suddenly found myself elbow to elbow with the most illustrious names of the age. I have loved hopelessly, I have been honored with a love I could not return! And with whose love? Great God! yours, madame, one of the loveliest and noblest women on earth! All this has sown confusion within me and without; it has bewildered and crushed me, madame.

"I am as terrified as a dwarf awaking to find himself among giants: I have n't an idea in its place, not a feeling which I can explain. I feel lost among all these

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terrible animosities, all these implacable passions, all these soaring ambitions. Madame, give me time to breathe, I conjure you; permit the poor shipwrecked wretch to collect his thoughts, the convalescent to recover his strength. Time, I hope, will restore order in my mind and my life. Time, madame, give me time, and in pity's name see in me to-day only the artist who comes to ask if his lily is to your taste."

The duchess stared at Ascanio in doubt and amazement; she had not supposed that this young man, this child, was capable of speaking in this grave, stern, poetic fashion; she felt morally constrained to obey him, and confined her conversation to the lily, praising and advising Ascanio, and promising to do her utmost to send him very soon the large diamond to complete his work. Ascanio thanked her, and took his leave with every mark of gratitude and respect.

"Can that be Ascanio?" said Madame d'Etampes to herself, when he had gone; "he seems ten years older. What gives him this almost imposing gravity? Is it suffering? is it happiness? Is he sincere, in short, or acting under the influence of that accursed Benvenuto? Is he playing a part with the talent of a consummate artist, or is he simply following his own nature?"

Anne was perplexed. The strange vertigo which gradually overpowered all those who contended with Benvenuto Cellini began to steal over her, despite her strength of mind. She set spies upon Ascanio, who followed him on the rare occasions when he left the studio, but that step led to no result. At last she sent for the provost and Comte d'Orbec, and advised them, as another would have ordered, to make a second and unexpected domiciliary visit to the Grand-Nesle.

They followed her advice; but, although surprised at

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his work, Benvenuto received them even more cordially than he received the provost alone on the former occasion. One would have said, so courteous and expansive was he, that their presence implied no suspicions that were insulting to him. He told Comte d'Orbec good-humoredly of the ambush that he fell into as he left his house with his golden burden a few days before, — on the same day, he observed, on which Mademoiselle d'Estourville disappeared. This time as before he offered to accompany his visitors through the château, and to assist the provost in recovering his authority as a father, whose sacred duties he understood so well. He was very happy that he happened to be at home to do honor to his guests, for he was to start that same day within two hours for Romorantin, having been named by François I., in his condescension, as one of the artists who were to go to meet the Emperor.

For events in the world of politics had moved on as rapidly as those of our humble narrative. Charles V., emboldened by his rival's public promise, and by the secret undertaking of Madame d'Etampes, was within a few day's journey of Paris. A deputation had been selected to go out to receive him, and D'Orbec and the provost found Cellini in travelling costume.

"If he leaves Paris with the rest of the escort," D'Orbec whispered to the provost, "in all probability he did n't carry off Colombe, and we have no business here."

"I told you so before we came," retorted the provost.

However, they decided to go through with their perquisition, and set about it with painstaking minuteness. Benvenuto accompanied them at first, but as he saw that their investigations were likely to be very prolonged, he asked their permission to leave them, and return to

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the studio to give some orders to his workmen, as he was to take his leave very soon, and desired to find the preparations for casting his Jupiter finished at his return.

He did in fact return to the studio, and distributed the work among his men, bidding them obey Ascanio as if he were himself. He then said a few words in Italian in Ascanio's ear, bade them all adieu, and prepared to take his departure. A horse all saddled, and held by little Jehan, awaited him in the outer court-yard.

At that moment Scozzone went up to Benvenuto and took him aside.

"Do you know, master," she said with a sober face, "that your departure leaves me in a very difficult position?"

"How so, my child?"

"Pagolo is becoming fonder of me all the time."

"Ah! is it so?"

"And he is forever talking to me about his love."

"What do you reply?"

"Dame! as you bade me, master. I say that I will see, and that perhaps it may be arranged."

"Very well."

"How is it very well? You don't understand, Benvenuto, that he takes everything that I say to him most seriously, and that I may be entering into a real engagement with him. It 's a fortnight since you laid down a rule of conduct for me to adopt, is it not?"

"Yes, I think so; I hardly remember."

"But I have a better memory than you. During the first five days I replied by reasoning gently with him: I told him he must try to conquer his passion, and love me no more. The next five days I listened in silence,

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and that was a very compromising kind of an answer; but you bade me do it, so I did it. Since then I have been driven to talk of my duty to you, and yesterday, master, I reached a point where I besought him to be generous, while he pressed me to confess my love for him."

"If that is so, it puts a different face on the matter," said Benvenuto.

"Ah, at last!" said Scozzone.

"Yes, now listen, little one. During the first three days of my absence, you will let him think that you love him; during the next three, you will confess your love."

"What, you bid me do that, Benvenuto!" cried Scozzone, deeply wounded at the master's too great confidence in her.

"Never you fear. What have you to reproach yourself for when I authorize you to do it?"

"Mon Dieu! nothing, I know," said Scozzone; "but being placed as I am between your indifference and his love, I may end by falling in love with him outright."

"Nonsense! in six days? Are n't you strong enough to remain indifferent to him six days?"

"Yes, indeed! I give you six days; but don't remain away seven, I beg you."

"No fear, my child, I will return in time. Adieu, Scozzone."

"Adieu, master," returned Scozzone, sulking, smiling, and weeping all at once.

While Cellini was giving Catherine these instructions, the provost and D'Orbec returned to the studio.

When they were left to themselves, with unrestricted freedom of movement, they went about their search in a sort of frenzy; they explored the garrets and cellars, sounded all the walls, moved all the furniture; they

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detained all the servants they met, and displayed the ardor of creditors with the patience of hunters. A hundred times they retraced their steps, examining the same thing again and again, like a sheriff's officer with a writ to serve, and when they had finished they were flushed and excited, but had discovered nothing.

"Well, messieurs," said Benvenuto, preparing to mount his horse, "you found nothing, eh? So much the worse! so much the worse! I understand what a painful thing it must be for two sensitive hearts like yours, but notwithstanding my sympathy with your suffering and my desire to assist in your search I must begone. If you feel called upon to visit the Grand-Nesle in my absence, do not hesitate, but make yourself perfectly at home here. I have given orders that the house be open to you at all times. My only consolation for leaving you in so anxious a frame of mind is the hope that I shall learn upon my return that you have found your daughter, Monsieur le Prévôt, and you your fair *fiancée*, Monsieur d'Orbec. Adieu, messieurs."

Thereupon he turned to his companions, who were standing in a group at the door, all save Ascanio, who doubtless did not care to stand face to face with his rival.

"Adieu, my children," he said. "If during my absence Monsieur le Prévôt desires to inspect my house a third time, do not forget to receive him as its former master."

With that little Jehan threw open the door, and Benvenuto galloped away.

"You see that we are idiots, my dear fellow," said Comte d'Orbec to the provost. "When a man has kidnapped a girl, he does n't go off to Romorantin with the court."

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VI.

CHARLES THE FIFTH AT FONTAINEBLEAU.

It was not without grave doubts and a terrible sinking at the heart that Charles V. stepped foot upon French territory, where earth and air were, so to speak, his enemies, whose king he had treated unworthily when he was a prisoner in his hands, and whose Dauphin he had perhaps poisoned, — he was at least accused of it. Europe anticipated terrible reprisals on the part of François I. from the moment that his rival placed himself in his power. But Charles's audacity, great gambler in empires that he was, would not permit him to draw back; and as soon as he had skilfully felt the ground and paved the way, he boldly crossed the Pyrenees.

He counted upon finding devoted friends at the French court, and thought that he could safely trust to three guaranties: the ambition of Madame d'Etampes, the overweening conceit of the Connétable Anne de Montmorency, and the king's chivalrous nature.

We have seen how and for what reason the duchess chose to serve his interests. With the constable it was a different matter. The great stumbling-block in the way of statesmen of all lands and all periods is the question of alliances. Politics, which, in this matter and many others, is perforce conjectural only, is often

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mistaken, alas! like the science of medicine, in studying the symptoms of affinities between peoples, and in risking remedies for their animosities. Now the constable was a monomaniac on the subject of the Spanish alliance. He had got it into his head that France's salvation lay in that direction, and provided that he could satisfy Charles V., who had been at war with his master twenty years out of twenty-five, he cared but little how much he displeased his other allies, the Turks and the Protestants, or let slip the most magnificent opportunities, like that which gave Flanders to François I.

The king had blind confidence in Montmorency. In truth the constable had in the last war against the Emperor displayed a hitherto unheard of resolution, and had checked the enemy's advance. To be sure he did it at the cost of the ruin of a province, by laying the country waste before him, by devastating a tenth part of France. But what especially impressed the king was his minister's haughty roughness of manner, his inflexible obstinacy, which to a superficial mind might seem cleverness and unswerving firmness of resolution. The result was that Francois listened to the "great suborner of men," as Brantôme calls him, with a deference equal to the fear inspired in his inferiors by this terrible reciter of *paternosters*, who alternated his prayers with hangings.

Charles V. could therefore safely rely upon the persevering friendship of the constable.

He placed even more reliance upon his rival's generosity. Indeed, François I. carried magnanimity to an absurd point.

"My kingdom," he said, "has no toll-house, like a bridge, and I do not sell my hospitality." The astute

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Charles knew that he could trust the word of the "knightly king."

Nevertheless, when the Emperor was fairly upon French territory, he could not overcome his apprehension and his doubts. He found the king's two sons awaiting him at the frontier, and throughout his journey they overwhelmed him with attentions and honors. But the crafty monarch shuddered as he thought that all this appearance of cordiality might conceal some deep-laid snare.

"I must say that I sleep very ill," he said, "in a foreign country."

He brought an anxious preoccupied face to the fêtes which were given him, and, as he advanced farther and farther toward the heart of the country, he became more and more sad and gloomy.

Whenever he rode into a city, he would ask himself, amid all the haranguing, as he passed beneath the triumphal arches, if that was the city where he was to be imprisoned; then he would murmur beneath his breath, "Not this or any other city, but all France, is my dungeon; all these assiduous courtiers are my jailers." And each hour as it passed added something to the apprehension of this tiger, who believed himself to be in a cage, and saw bars on all sides.

One day, as they were riding along, Charles d'Orléans, a fascinating, frolicsome child, — who was in great haste to be amiable and gallant, as a son of France, before dying of the plague like any peasant, — leaped lightly to the saddle behind the Emperor and threw his arms about his waist, crying gleefully, "Now you are my prisoner!" Charles became pale as death, and nearly fainted.

At Châtellerault, the poor imaginary captive was met

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by François, who welcomed him fraternally, and on the following day presented the whole court to him, — the valorous, magnificent nobility, the glory of the country, and the artists and men of letters, the glory of the king. The fêtes and merry-makings began in good earnest. The Emperor wore a brave face everywhere, but in his heart he was afraid, and constantly reproached himself for his imprudence. From time to time, as if to test his liberty, he would go out at daybreak from the château where he had lain at night, and he was delighted to see that his movements were not interfered with outside of the honors paid him. But could he be sure that he was not watched from a distance? Sometimes, as if from mere caprice, he changed the itinerary arranged for his journey, to the despair of François I., because part of the ceremonial prescribed by him went for naught as a consequence.

When he was within two day's ride of Paris he remembered with terror the French king's sojourn at Madrid. For an emperor the capital would seem to be the most honorable place of detention, and at the same time the surest. He therefore begged the king to escort him at once to Fontainebleau, of which he had heard so much. This overturned all of François's plans, but he was too hospitable to allow his disappointment to appear, and at once sent word to the queen and all the ladies to repair to Fontainebleau.

The presence of his sister Eleanora, and her confidence in her husband's good faith, allayed the Emperor's anxiety to some extent. But, although reassured for the moment, Charles V. was never able to feel at his ease while he was within the dominions of the King of France. François was the mirror of the past, Charles the type of the future. The sovereign of modern times

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never rightly understood the hero of the Middle Ages; it was impossible that there should be any real sympathy between the last of the chevaliers and the first of the diplomatists.

It is true Louis XI. might, strictly speaking, lay claim to this latter title, but in our opinion Louis XI. was not so much the scheming diplomatist as the grasping miser.

On the day of the Emperor's arrival there was a hunting party in the forest of Fontainebleau. Hunting was a favorite pastime of François I. It was not much better than a terrible bore to Charles V. Nevertheless he seized with avidity this further opportunity to see if he was not a prisoner; he let the hunt pass, took a by-road, and rode about at random until he was lost. But when he found that he was entirely alone in the middle of the forest, as free as the air that blew through the branches, or as the birds that flew through the air, he was almost wholly reassured, and began to recover his good humor in some measure. And yet the anxious expression returned to his face when, upon his making his appearance at the rendezvous, François came to him, flushed with the excitement of the chase, and still holding in his hand the bleeding boar-spear. The warrior of Marignano and Pavia was much in evidence in the king's pleasures.

"Come, my dear brother, let us enjoy ourselves!" said François, passing his arm through Charles's in a friendly way, when they had both alighted at the palace gate, and, leading him to the Galerie de Diane, resplendent with the paintings of Rosso and Primaticcio. "Vrai Dieu! you are as thoughtful as I was at Madrid. But you will agree, my dear brother, that I had some reason for being so, for I was your prisoner,

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while you are my guest; you are free, you are on the eve of a triumph. Rejoice therefore with us, if not because of the fêtes, which are doubtless beneath the notice of a great politician like yourself, at least in the thought that you are on your way to humble all those beer-drinking Flemings, who presume to talk of renewing the Communes. Or, better still, forget the rebels, and think only of enjoying yourself with friends. Does not my court impress you pleasantly?"

"It is superb, my brother," said Charles, "and I envy you. I too have a court — you have seen it — but a stern, joyless court, a gloomy assemblage of statesmen and generals like Lannoy, Peschiara, and Antonio de Leyra. But you have, beside your warriors and statesmen, beside your Montmorencys and Dubellays, beside your scholars, beside Budée, Duchâtel, and Lascaris, — beside all these you have your poets and your artists, Marot, Jean Goujon, Primaticcio, Benvenuto; and, above all, your adorable women, — Marguerite de Navarre, Diane de Poitiers, Catherine de Medicis, and so many others; and verily I begin to believe, my dear brother, that I would willingly exchange my gold mines for your flower-strewn fields."

"Ah! but you have not yet seen the fairest of all those lovely flowers," said François naïvely to Eleanora's brother.

"No, and I am dying with longing to see that marvellous pearl of loveliness," said the Emperor, who understood that the king alluded to Madame d'Etampes; "but even now I think that it is well said that yours is the fairest realm on earth, my brother."

"But you have the fairest countship, Flanders; the fairest duchy, Milan."

"You refused the first last month," said the Emperor,

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smiling, "and I thank you for so doing; but you covet the other, do you not?" he added with a sigh.

"Ah! let us not talk of serious matters to-day, my cousin, I beg you," said François; "after the pleasures of war there is nothing, I confess, which I like less to disturb than the pleasures of a festal occasion like the present."

"It is the truth," rejoined Charles, with the grimace of a miser, who realizes that he must pay a debt, "it is the truth that the Milanese is very dear to my heart, and that it would be like tearing my heart out to give it to you."

"Say rather to return it to me, my brother; that word would be more accurate, and would perhaps soften your disappointment. But that is not the matter in hand now; we must enjoy ourselves. We will talk of the Milanese later."

"Gift or restitution, given or returned," said the Emperor, "you will none the less possess one of the finest lordships in the world; for you shall have it, my brother; it is decided, and I will keep my engagements with you as faithfully as you keep yours with me."

"Mon Dieu!" cried François, beginning to be vexed at this everlasting recurrence to serious matters; "what do you regret, my brother? Are you not King of the Spains, Emperor of Germany, Count of Flanders, and lord, either by influence or by right of your sword, of all Italy, from the foot of the Alps to the farthest point of Calabria?"

"But you have France!" rejoined Charles with a sigh.

"You have the Indies and their golden treasures; you have Peru and the mines!"

"But you have France!"

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"You reign over an empire so vast that the sun never sets upon it."

"But you have France! What would your Majesty say, if I should cast an eye on this diamond among kingdoms, as fondly and gloatingly as you gaze upon that pearl of duchies, Milan?"

"Look, you, my brother," said François gravely, "I have instincts rather than ideas upon these momentous questions; but, as they say in your country, 'Do not touch the queen!' so I say to you, 'Do not touch France!'"

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Charles; "are we not cousins and allies?"

"Most certainly," was François's reply, "and I most earnestly hope that nothing will happen henceforth to embitter our relationship or disturb our alliance."

"I too hope so," said the Emperor. "But," he continued, with his cunning smile and hypocritical expression, "can I answer for the future, and prevent my son Philip, for instance, from falling out with your son Henri?"

"Such a quarrel would not be dangerous for France, if Augustus is succeeded by Tiberius."

"What matter who the master is?" said Charles, waxing warm; "the Empire will still be the Empire, and the Rome of the Cæsars was still Rome when the Cæsars had ceased to be Cæsars in everything save name."

"True, but the Empire of Charles V. is not the Empire of Octavius, my brother," said François, a little piqued. "Pavia was a glorious battle, but it was no Actium; then, too, Octavius was very wealthy, while, notwithstanding your Indian treasures and your Peruvian mines, you are well known to be in straitened

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circumstances financially; your unpaid troops were driven to sack Rome to procure means of subsistence, and now that Rome is sacked they are in revolt."

"And you, my brother," said Charles, "have alienated the royal domains, as I am informed, and are driven to treat Luther very tenderly, so that the German princes may consent to loan you money."

"Not to mention the fact," retorted François, "that your Cortes is very far from being so manageable as the Senate, while I can boast that I have freed the Kings of France from their dependence forever."

"Beware that your parliaments don't put you back into leading-strings some fine day."

The discussion was growing warm, both monarchs were getting excited, and the long standing antipathy which had kept them apart so long, was beginning to glow afresh. François was on the point of forgetting the duties of hospitality, and Charles the dictates of prudence, when the former suddenly remembered that he was beneath his own roof.

"On my word, my good brother," he exclaimed abruptly, laughing aloud, "I believe, by Mahomet's belly! that we were near losing our tempers. I told you that we must not talk of serious matters, but must leave such discussions to our ministers, and keep for ourselves only our good friendship. Come, let us agree, once for all, that you are to have the world, less France, and drop the subject."

"And less the Milanese, my brother," said Charles, realizing the imprudence he had been guilty of, and seeking at once to avoid its effects, "for the Milanese is yours. I have promised it to you, and I renew my promise."

As they exchanged these mutual assurances of con-

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tinuing good will, the door of the gallery opened, and Madame d'Etampes appeared. The king walked quickly to meet her, took her hand, and led her to where the Emperor stood, who, seeing her then for the first time, and, being fully informed as to what had taken place between her and Monsieur de Medina, fixed his most penetrating gaze upon her as she approached.

"My brother," said the king smiling, "do you see this fair dame?"

"Not only do I see her," replied Charles, "but I admire her."

"Very well! you do not know what she wants?"

"Is it one of my Spains? I will give it her."

"No, no, brother, not that."

"What then?"

"She wants me to detain you at Paris until you have destroyed the treaty of Madrid, and confirmed by acts the promise you have given me."

"If the advice is good, you should follow it," rejoined the Emperor, bowing low before the duchess, as much to hide the sudden pallor which these words caused to overspread his face, as to perform an act of courtesy.

He had no time to say more, nor could François see the effect produced by the words he had laughingly let fall, and which Charles was quite ready to take seriously, for the door opened again and the whole court poured into the gallery.

During the half-hour preceding dinner, when this clever, cultivated, corrupt throng was assembled in the salons of the palace, the scene we described apropos of the reception at the Louvre was re-enacted in all its essential details. There were the same men and the same women, the same courtiers and the same valets.

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Loving and malevolent glances were exchanged as usual, and sarcastic remarks and gallant speeches were indulged in with the customary freedom.

Charles V., spying Anne de Montmorency, whom he with good reason deemed to be his surest ally, went to him, and talked in a corner with him and the Duke of Medina, his ambassador.

"I will sign whatever you choose, constable," said the Emperor, who knew the old campaigner's loyalty; "prepare a deed of cession of the Duchy of Milan, and by Saint James, though it be one of the brightest jewels of my crown, I will sign an absolute surrender of it to you."

"A deed!" cried the constable, hotly putting aside the suggestion of a precaution which implied distrust. "A deed, Sire! what is your Majesty's meaning? No deed, Sire, no deed; your word, nothing more. Does your Majesty think that we shall have less confidence in you than you had in us, when you came to France with no written document to rely upon?"

"You will do as you should do, Monsieur de Montmorency," rejoined the Emperor, giving him his hand, "you will do what you should do."

The constable walked away.

"Poor dupe!" exclaimed the Emperor; "he plays at politics, Medina, as moles dig their holes, blindly."

"But the king, Sire?" queried Medina.

"The king is too proud of his own grandeur of soul not to be sure of ours. He will foolishly let us go, Medina, and we will prudently let him wait. To make him wait, my lord, is not to break my promise, but to postpone its fulfilment, that is all."

"But Madame d'Etampes?" suggested Medina.

"As to her we shall see," said the Emperor, moving

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up and down a magnificent ring with a superb diamond, which he wore on his left thumb. "Ah! I must have a long interview with her."

While these words were rapidly exchanged in low tones between the Emperor and his minister, the duchess was mercilessly making sport of Marmagne, apropos of his nocturnal exploits, all in presence of Messire d'Estourville.

"Can it be of your people, Monsieur de Marmagne," she was saying, "that Benvenuto tells every comer this extraordinary story? Attacked by four bandits, and with but one arm free to defend himself, he simply made these gentry escort him home. Were you one of these gentlemanly bravos, viscount?"

"Madame," replied poor Marmagne, in confusion, "it did not take place precisely in that way, and Benvenuto tells the story too favorably for himself."

"Yes, yes, I doubt not that he embroiders it a little, and adds a few details by way of ornament, but the main fact is true, viscount, the main fact is true; and in such matters the main fact is everything."

"Madame," returned Marmagne, "I promise you that I will have my revenge, and I shall be more fortunate next time."

"Pardon, viscount, pardon! it's not a question of revenge, but of beginning another game. Cellini, I should say, has won the first two bouts."

"Yes, thanks to my absence," muttered Marmagne, with increasing embarrassment; "because my men took advantage of my not being there to run away, the miserable villains!"

"Oh!" said the provost, "I advise you, Marmagne, to admit that you are beaten in that direction; you have no luck with Cellini."

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"In that case it seems to me that we may console each other, my dear provost," retorted Marmagne, "for if we add known facts to the mysterious rumors which are in circulation, — the capture of the Grand-Nesle to the reported disappearance of one of its fair inmates, — Cellini would seem not to have brought you luck either, Messire d'Estourville. To be sure, he is said to be actively interested in the fortunes of your family, if not in your own, my dear provost."

"Monsieur de Marmagne," cried the provost fiercely, in a furious rage to learn that his paternal infelicity was beginning to be noised abroad, — "Monsieur de Marmagne, you will explain to me later what you mean by your words."

"Ah messieurs, messieurs!" exclaimed the duchess, "do not forget, I beg you, that I am here. You are both in the wrong. Monsieur le Prévôt, it is not for those who know so little about seeking to ridicule those who know so little about finding. Monsieur de Marmagne, in the hour of defeat we must unite against the common enemy, and not afford him the additional satisfaction of seeing the vanquished slashing at one another's throats. They are going to the *salle-à-manger;* your hand, Monsieur de Marmagne. Ah, well! since it seems that men, for all their strength, avail nothing against Cellini, we will see if a woman's wiles will find him equally invincible. I have always thought that allies were simply in the way, and have always loved to make war alone. The risk is greater, I know, but at least the honors of victory are not to be shared with any one."

"The impertinent varlet!" exclaimed Marmagne; "see how familiarly he is talking to our great king. Would not one say he was nobly born, whereas he is naught but a mere stone-cutter."

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"What's that you say, viscount? Why, he is a nobleman, and of the most venerable nobility!" said the duchess, with a laugh. "Do you know of many among our oldest families who descend from a lieutenant of Julius Cæsar, and who have the three *fleurs-de-lis* and the *lambel* of the house of Anjou in their crest? 'T is not the king who honors the sculptor by speaking to him, messieurs, as you see; the sculptor, on the other hand, confers honor upon the king by condescending to address him."

François I. and Cellini were in fact conversing at that moment with the familiarity to which the great ones of earth had accustomed the chosen artist of Heaven.

"Well, Benvenuto," the king was saying, "how do we come on with our Jupiter?"

"I am preparing to cast it, Sire."

"And when will that great work be performed?"

"Immediately upon my return to Paris, Sire."

"Take our best foundrymen, Cellini, and omit nothing to make the operation successful. If you need money, you know that I am ready."

"I know that you are the greatest, the noblest, and the most generous king on earth, Sire," replied Benvenuto; "but thanks to the salary which your Majesty orders paid to me, I am rich. As to the operation concerning which you are somewhat anxious, Sire, I will, with your gracious permission, rely upon my own resources to prepare and execute it. I distrust all your French foundrymen, not that they are unskilful, but because I am afraid that their national pride will make them disinclined to place their skill at the service of an artist from beyond the Alps. And I confess, Sire, that I attach too much importance to the success of my Jupiter to allow any other than myself to lay hand to it."

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"Bravo, Cellini, bravo!" cried the king; "spoken like a true artist."

"Moreover," added Benvenuto, "I wish to be entitled to remind your Majesty of the promise you made me."

"That is right, my trusty friend. If we are content with it, we are to grant you a boon. We have not forgotten. Indeed, if we should forget, we bound ourselves in the presence of witnesses. Is it not so, Montmorency? and Poyet? Our constable and our chancellor will remind us of our plighted word."

"Ah! your Majesty cannot conceive how precious that word has become to me since the day it was given."

"Very well! it shall be kept, Monsieur. But the doors are open. To table, messieurs, to table!"

François thereupon joined the Emperor, and the two together walked at the head of the procession formed by the illustrious guests. Both wings of the folding doors being thrown open, the two sovereigns entered side by side and took places facing each other, Charles between Eleanora and Madame d'Etampes, François between Catherine de Medicis and Marguerite de Navarre.

The banquet was exquisite and the guests in the best of spirits. François was in his element, and enjoyed himself in kingly fashion, but laughed like a serf at all the tales told him by Marguerite de Navarre. Charles overwhelmed Madame d'Etampes with compliments and attentions. The others talked of art and politics, and so the time passed.

At dessert, as was customary, the pages brought water for the guests to wash their hands. Thereupon Madame d'Etampes took the ewer and basin intended for Charles V. from the hands of the servitor, while

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Marguerite did the same for François, poured water from the ewer into the basin, and, kneeling upon one knee, according to the Spanish etiquette, presented the basin to the Emperor. He dipped the ends of his fingers, gazing at his noble and beautiful attendant the while, and laughingly dropped the superb ring, of which we have spoken, into the water.

"Your Majesty is losing your ring," said Anne, dipping her own taper fingers into the water, and daintily picking up the jewel, which she handed to the Emperor.

"Keep the ring, madame," the Emperor replied, in a low voice; "the hands in which it now is are too noble and too beautiful for me to take it from them again. It is to bind the bargain for the Duchy of Milan," he added, in a still lower tone.

The duchess smiled and said no more. The pebble had fallen at her feet, but the pebble was worth a million.

As they returned from the *salle-à-manger* to the salon, and passed thence to the ball-room, Madame d'Etampes stopped Benvenuto, who was brought near to her by the press.

"Messire Cellini," said she, handing him the ring which constituted a pledge of the alliance between the Emperor and herself, "here is a diamond which you will hand, if you please, to your pupil Ascanio, for the crown of my lily; it is the dewdrop I promised him."

"And it has fallen from Aurora's fingers in very truth, madame," rejoined the artist with a mocking smile and affected gallantry.

He glanced at the ring, and started back in surprise, for he recognized the diamond he had long ago set for

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"'Your Majesty is losing your ring,' said Anne."

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Pope Clement VII. and had himself carried to the sublime Emperor on the sovereign Pontiff's behalf.

To induce Charles V. to divest himself of such a priceless jewel, especially in favor of a woman, there must necessarily be some secret understanding, some occult treaty, between himself and the recipient.

While Charles continues to pass his days and nights at Fontainebleau, in the alternations of distrust and confidence, we have endeavored to describe, while he schemes, intrigues, burrows underground, promises, retracts, and promises anew, let us cast a glance upon the Grand-Nesle, and see if anything of interest is occurring among those of its occupants who have remained there.

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VII.

THE GHOSTLY MONK.

THE whole colony was in a state of intense excitement. The ghost of the monk, the unsubstantial guest of the convent, upon the ruins of which Amaury's palace was built, had returned within three or four days. Dame Perrine had seen him walking around at night in the gardens of the Grand-Nesle, clad in his long white frock, and treading so lightly that he left no footprints on the ground, and made no noise.

How happened it that Dame Perrine, whose domicile was the Petit-Nesle, had seen the ghostly visitor walking in the garden of the Grand-Nesle at three o'clock in the morning? We cannot tell except by committing a very grave indiscretion, but we are historians first of all, and our readers are entitled to know the most secret details of the lives of the characters we have brought upon the stage, especially when those details are calculated to throw a bright light upon the sequel of our narrative.

Dame Perrine, by virtue of Colombe's disappearance, by the retirement of Pulchérie, for whose presence there was no further pretext, and by the departure of the provost, was left absolute mistress of the Petit-Nesle; for the gardener Raimbault and his assistants were, for economical reasons, engaged in Messire

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d'Estourville's service during the day only. Dame Perrine found herself, therefore, queen of the Petit-Nesle, but at the same time a solitary queen, so that she nearly died of ennui during the day, and of fear at night.

It occurred to her that there was a remedy for this unfortunate condition of affairs, during the day at least; her friendly relations with Dame Ruperta opened the doors of the Grand-Nesle to her. She asked permission to visit her neighbors, and it was most cordially granted.

But upon availing herself of this permission Dame Perrine was naturally brought in contact with her neighbors of the other sex. Dame Perrine was a buxom creature of thirty-six years, who confessed to twenty-nine of them. Plump and rosy still, and always prepossessing, her coming was quite an event in the studio, where ten or twelve worthy fellows were forging, cutting, filing, hammering, chiselling, — good livers all, fond of play on Sundays, of wine on Sundays and holidays, and of the fair sex all the time. Three of our old acquaintances, after three or four days had passed, were all brought down with the same arrow.

They were little Jehan, Simon-le-Gaucher, and Hermann the German.

Ascanio, Jacques Aubry, and Pagolo escaped the charm, having their minds on other things.

The other comrades may well have felt some sparks of this Greek fire, but they realized their inferior position, no doubt, and poured the water of their humility upon the first sparks before they became a conflagration.

Little Jehan loved after the manner of Cherubino, that is to say, he was in love with loving. Dame

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Perrine, as the reader will readily understand, had too much common sense to respond to such an *ignis fatuus* as that.

Simon-le-Gaucher could offer more reliable future prospects, and his flame promised to be more enduring, but Dame Perrine was a very superstitious person. She had seen Simon cross himself with his left hand, and she reflected that it would be necessary for him to sign the marriage contract with his left hand. Dame Perrine was convinced that the sign of the cross executed with the left hand was calculated to destroy rather than to save a soul, and in like manner no one could have persuaded her that a marriage contract signed with the left hand could have any other result than an unhappy menage. She therefore, but without disclosing the reasons for her repugnance, received Simon-le-Gaucher's first advances in a way to make him renounce all hope.

Hermann remained. Ah, Hermann! that was a different matter.

Hermann was no coxcomb, like little Jehan, nor a man with the seal of Nature's displeasure upon him, like left-handed Simon; in Hermann's personality there was something honest and outspoken which appealed to Dame Perrine's heart. Moreover, Hermann, instead of having a left hand for the right and *vice versa*, made use of either or both so energetically that he seemed to have two right hands. He was a magnificent man too, according to all vulgar ideas. Dame Perrine therefore had fixed her choice upon Hermann.

But, as we know, Hermann was as innocent as Celadon. The result was that Dame Perrine's first broadsides, the pouting and sighs and sidelong glances, were

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utterly powerless against the naïve timidity of the honest German. He contented himself with staring at Dame Perrine out of his great round eyes; but, like the blind men of the Gospel, "eyes had he, but he saw not," or if he did see, he saw the buxom governess as a whole simply, without noting details. Dame Perrine repeatedly proposed that they should go for a walk on the Quai des Augustins, or in the gardens of the Grand- or Petit-Nesle, and on every occasion she selected Hermann for her cavalier. This made Hermann very happy internally. His great Teutonic heart beat five or six extra pulsations a minute when Dame Perrine was hanging upon his arm; but either because he found some difficulty in pronouncing the French language, or because it gave him greater pleasure to hear the object of his secret thoughts talk, Dame Perrine could rarely extract anything more from him than these two sacramental phrases, "Ponchour, matemoizelle," and "Atieu, matemoizelle," which Hermann generally pronounced at an interval of two hours; the first when Dame Perrine took his arm, the second when she let it go. Now, although this title of Mademoiselle was immensely flattering to Dame Perrine, and although there was something very agreeable in talking two hours without fear of interruption, she would have been glad to have her monologue broken in upon by an occasional interjection which might give her some idea of the progress she was making in the heart of her mute attendant.

Her progress, however, was none the less real for not being expressed in words or by play of feature; the fire was kindled in the honest German's heart, and, being fanned every day by Dame Perrine's presence, became a veritable volcano. Hermann began at last to be con-

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scious of the preference Dame Perrine accorded him, and he was only waiting until he was a little more certain of it to declare himself. Dame Perrine understood his hesitation. One evening, as he parted from her at the door of the Petit-Nesle, she saw that he was so agitated that she thought it would be a real kindness on her part to press his hand. Hermann, transported with delight, responded by a similar demonstration; but to his great amazement Dame Perrine gave a piercing shriek. In his delirious bliss, Hermann did not measure his pressure. He thought that the tighter he squeezed her hand, the more accurate idea he would convey of the violence of his passion; and he very nearly crushed the poor governess's fingers.

Hermann was thunderstruck by her shriek; but Dame Perrine, fearing to discourage him just as he had summoned up courage to make his first advance, forced herself to smile, and said, as she separated her fingers, which were almost glued together for the moment: —

"It's nothing, nothing, dear Monsieur Hermann; it 's nothing, absolutely nothing."

"Tausend pardons, Matemoizelle Perrine," said the German, "but I lofe you sehr viel, and I haf pressed your hant as I lofe you! Tausend pardons!"

"There 's no need, Monsieur Hermann, there 's no need. Your love is an honorable love, I trust, which a woman need not blush to win."

"O Tieu! O Tieu!" cried Hermann, "indeed, my lofe is honorable, Matemoizelle Perrine; put I haf not yet tared to speak to you of it; put since die wort haf escaped me, I lofe you, I lofe you, I lofe you sehr viel, Matemoizelle Perrine."

"And I, Monsieur Hermann," said Dame Perrine mincingly, "think I can say, for I believe you to be a

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gallant youth, incapable of compromising a poor woman, that — Mon Dieu ! how shall I say it?"

"Oh say it ! say it !" cried Hermann.

"Well ! that — ah, it is wrong of me to confess it!"

"Nein, nein ! it is not wrong. Say it ! say it !"

"Very well. I confess that I am not indifferent to your passion."

"Sacrement !" cried the German, beside himself with joy.

Now one evening when, after a promenade, the Juliet of the Petit-Nesle had escorted her Romeo to the door of the Grand-Nesle, she espied as she was returning alone through the garden door, the white spectre we have mentioned, which, in the opinion of the worthy governess, could be no other than that of the monk. It is needless to say that Dame Perrine entered the house half dead with fear, and barricaded herself in her room.

The next morning the whole studio was acquainted with the story of the nocturnal apparition. Dame Perrine, however, contented herself with relating the simple fact without going into details. The ghostly monk had appeared. That was the whole of it. It was useless to question her, for she would say nothing more.

All that day the ghostly monk was the engrossing subject of conversation at the Grand-Nesle. Some believed in the appearance of the phantom, others laughed at it. It was noticed that Ascanio was the leader of the sceptics, the others being little Jehan, Simon-le-Gaucher, and Jacques Aubry. The faction of the believers included Dame Ruperta, Scozzone, Pagolo, and Hermann.

In the evening they all assembled in the second

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courtyard of the Petit-Nesle. Dame Perrine, when questioned in the morning as to the origin of the legend of the ghostly monk, requested that she might have the day to refresh her memory, and when night came she announced that she was ready to relate the awful story. Dame Perrine was as knowing in the matter of stage effects as a modern dramatist, and she knew that a ghost story loses all its effect if told in the sunlight, while, on the other hand, that effect is doubled if it is told in the dark.

Her audience consisted of Hermann, who sat at her right, Dame Ruperta, who sat at her left, Pagolo and Scozzone, who sat side by side, and Jacques Aubry, who lay on the grass between his two friends, little Jehan and Simon-le-Gaucher. Ascanio had declared that he held such old women's tales in utter contempt, and would not even listen to them.

"Unt zo, Matemoizelle Perrine," said Hermann after a moment of silence, while each one arranged his posture so as to listen at ease, "unt zo you are going to tell us the story of the monk's ghost?"

"Yes," said Dame Perrine, "yes; but I ought to warn you that it's a terrible story, and perhaps not a very comfortable one to listen to at this hour; but as we are all devout persons, although there may be some sceptics among us on the subject of ghosts, and as Monsieur Hermann is strong enough to put Satan himself to flight if he should make his appearance, I will venture to tell you the story."

"Pardon, pardon, Matemoizelle Perrine, put if Satan comes I must tell you not to count on me; I will fight mit men, ja, all you choose, put not mit der Teufel."

"Never mind I will fight him if he comes, Dame

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Perrine," said Jacques Aubry. "Go on, and don't be afraid."

"Is there a charcoal-purner in your story, Matemoizelle Perrine?" queried Hermann.

"A charcoal-burner? No, Monsieur Hermann."

"All right; it 's all the same."

"Why a charcoal-burner?"

"Because in all the Cherman stories there is a charcoal-purner. Put never mind, it must be a fine story all the same. Go on, Matemoizelle Perrine."

"You must know, then," began Dame Perrine, "that there was formerly on this spot where we now sit, and before the Hôtel de Nesle was built, a community of monks, composed of the handsomest men ever seen, the shortest of whom was as tall as Monsieur Hermann."

"Peste! what a community that must have been!" cried Jacques Aubry.

"Be quiet, babbler!" said Scozzone.

"Yes, be quiet, pappler!" echoed Hermann.

"I'll be quiet, I'll be quiet," said the student; "go on, Dame Perrine."

"The prior, whose name was Enguerrand, was a particularly fine specimen. They all had glossy black beards, with black and gleaming eyes; but the prior had the blackest beard and the brightest eyes of all. Moreover the worthy brethren were devout and austere in their devotion to an unparalleled degree, and their voices were so melodious and sweet that people came from leagues around simply to hear them sing the vesper service. At least so I have been told."

"Oh the poor monks!" said Ruperta.

"It 's extremely interesting," said Jacques Aubry.

"Es ist sehr wunderbar," said Hermann.

"One day," pursued Dame Perrine, flattered by the

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marks of appreciation evoked by her narrative, "a handsome young man was brought before the prior, who requested to be admitted to the convent as a novice; he had no beard as yet, but he had large eyes as black as ebony, and long dark hair with a glossy shimmer like jet, so that he was admitted without hesitation. He said that his name was Antonio, and requested to be attached to the personal service of the prior, a request which was granted without hesitation. I spoke of voices just now, but Antonio's was the fresh and melodious voice *par excellence*. Everybody who heard him sing on the following Sunday was carried away by it, and yet there was a something in the voice which distressed even while it fascinated you, a quality which aroused worldly rather than celestial ideas in the hearts of those who listened to it; but all the monks were so pure of heart that none but strangers experienced this singular emotion, and Don Enguerrand, who was utterly unconscious of anything of the sort, was so enchanted with Antonio's voice that he appointed him thenceforth to sing the responses in the anthems alone, alternately with the organ.

"The conduct of the young novice was most exemplary, and he waited upon the prior with incredible zeal and earnestness. The only thing for which he could possibly be reproved was his constant fits of distraction from his devotions; always and everywhere his glowing eyes were fastened upon the prior.

"'What are you looking at, Antonio?' Don Enguerrand would say to him.

"'I am looking at you, my father,' would be the reply.

"'Look at your prayer-book, Antonio. Now what are you looking at?'

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"'You, my father.'

"'Antonio, look at the image of the Virgin. What are you looking at now?'

"'You, my father.'

"'Antonio, look at the crucifix which we adore.'

"Don Enguerrand began to notice, after a time, upon searching his conscience, that since Antonio's reception into the community he had been more troubled than formerly by evil thoughts. Never before had he sinned more than seven times a day, which, as we all know, is the reckoning of the saints, — sometimes even he had examined his conduct for the day without being able to find more than five or six sins, an extraordinary thing. But now the total of his daily peccadillos mounted as high as ten, twelve, or even fifteen. He would try to make up for it on the following day; he would pray and fast and scourge himself, would the worthy man. Ah! but the farther he went, the greater became the reckoning, until at last it reached a full score. Poor Don Enguerrand knew not which way to turn; he felt that he was damned in spite of all he could do, and he noticed — an observation which might have comforted another, but which increased his consternation — that his most austere monks were under the same strange, incredible, incomprehensible influence; so that their confession, which formerly lasted twenty minutes, half an hour, or an hour at most, now occupied several hours.

"About this time, an occurrence which had been creating a great stir in the province for a month past at last became known at the convent. The lord of a castle near by had lost his daughter Antonia. Antonia had disappeared one fine evening exactly as my poor Colombe has disappeared. But there is this difference:

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I am sure that Colombe is an angel, while it seems that Antonia was possessed of the devil. The poor father had sought the fugitive high and low, just as Monsieur le Prévôt has sought Colombe. Only the convent remained to be visited, and as he knew that the evil spirit, the better to elude search, sometimes conceals himself in monasteries, he sent his chaplain to Don Enguerrand to ask permission to make search in his. The prior assented, with the best possible grace. Perhaps, he thought, he might by means of this visit discover something concerning the magic influence which had been weighing upon him and his brethren for a month past. But no! the search had no result whatever, and the nobleman was about to retire more despairing than ever, when all the monks passed in procession before him and Don Enguerrand, on their way to the chapel for the evening service. He looked at them mechanically, one after another, until the last one passed, when he cried out: —

"'God in heaven! that is Antonia! that is my daughter!'

"Antonia, for it was she, became as pale as a lily.

"'What are you doing in this sacred garb?' continued the father.

"'What am I doing, father?' said Antonia; 'I am loving Don Enguerrand with all my heart.'

"'Leave this convent instantly, wretched girl!' cried her father.

"'I will go out only as a corpse, father,' replied Antonia.

"Thereupon, despite her father's outcries, she darted into the chapel on the heels of the monks, and took her place in her accustomed stall. The prior stood as if turned to stone. The furious nobleman would have

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pursued his daughter, but Don Enguerrand begged him not to profane the holy place by such a scandalous scene, and to wait until the service was at an end. The father consented, and followed Don Enguerrand into the chapel.

"The anthem was about to be chanted, and the majestic prelude upon the organ was like the voice of God. A wonderfully beautiful strain, but instinct with bitter irony, and awful to hear, responded to the sublime tones of the instrument; it was Antonia's voice, and every listening heart shuddered. The organ took up the chant, calm, grave, impressive, and seemed as if it were seeking to drown with its divine magnificence the bitter strains which insulted it from the stalls. Again, as if in acceptance of the challenge, Antonia's voice arose more wildly despairing, more impious, than before. Everybody awaited in speechless dismay the result of this awful dialogue, this alternation of blasphemy and prayer, this strange conflict between God and Satan, and it was amid the most intense and agonizing silence that the celestial music burst forth like a peal of thunder, when the blasphemous strain died away, and poured out upon the heads of the listeners, all bowed save one, the torrents of its wrath. It was something like the dread voice which the guilty will hear on the judgment day. Antonia tried to keep up the contest, but her song this time was nothing more than a shrill, heart-rending cry, like the laugh of the damned, and she fell pale and stiff upon the pavement of the chapel. When they raised her, she was dead."

"Jésus Maria!" cried Dame Ruperta.

"Poor Antonia!" said Hermann innocently.

"Little fool!" muttered Jacques Aubry.

The others kept silence, so great was the impression

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produced even upon the sceptics by Dame Perrine's narrative, but Scozzone wiped away a tear, and Pagolo crossed himself.

"When the prior," resumed Dame Perrine, "saw the devil's messenger thus crushed by the wrath of God, he believed, poor dear man, that he was forever delivered from the snares of the tempter; but he reckoned without his host, a very appropriate expression, as he had been so imprudent as to extend his hospitality to one possessed of the devil. On the following night, just after he had dropped off to sleep, he was awakened by the clanking of chains; he opened his eyes, instinctively turned them toward the door, and saw that it swung open unaided, and at the same time a phantom clad in the white robe of a novice drew near the bed, took him by the arm, and cried, 'I am Antonia! Antonia, who loves thee! and God has given me full power over thee because thou hast sinned, in thought if not in act.' And every night at midnight the terrible apparition returned, implacably true to its word, until at last Don Enguerrand made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and died, by the special favor of God, just as he knelt before the Holy Sepulchre.

"But Antonia was not satisfied. She fell back upon all the monks in general, and, as there were very few who had not sinned as deeply as the poor prior, she visited them all one after another during the night, roughly awaking them, and crying in an awe-inspiring voice: 'I am Antonia! I am Antonia, who loves thee!'

"Hence the name of the ghostly monk.

"When you are walking through the streets at night, and a figure with a gray or white hood dogs your steps, hasten home; it is the ghostly monk in quest of prey.

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"When the convent was demolished to make room for the château, they hoped to be rid of the spectre, but it seems that he is fond of the spot. At various times he has reappeared. And now, God forgive us our sins! the unhappy wretch has appeared again. May God preserve us from his wicked designs!"

"Amen!" said Dame Ruperta, crossing herself.

"Amen!" said Hermann, with a shudder.

"Amen!" said Jacques Aubry, laughing.

And each of the others repeated the word with an inflection corresponding to the impression produced upon him.

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VIII.

WHAT ONE SEES AT NIGHT FROM THE TOP OF A POPLAR.

On the following day, which was that on which the whole court was to return from Fontainebleau, it was Dame Ruperta's turn to announce to the same auditory that she had a momentous revelation to make.

As may be imagined, after such an interesting announcement, the whole party assembled once more in the same spot at the same hour.

They were entirely at their case, because Benvenuto had written to Ascanio that he should stay behind for two or three days to prepare the hall where his Jupiter was to be displayed, which Jupiter was to be cast immediately upon his return.

The provost had simply made his appearance at the Hôtel de Nesle to ask if there was any news of Colombe; but upon being informed by Dame Perrine that everything was *in statu quo*, he at once returned to the Châtelet.

The occupants of the Grand and Petit-Nesle enjoyed entire freedom of action, therefore, both masters being absent.

In the case of Jacques Aubry, although he was to have met Gervaise that evening, curiosity carried the day over love, or rather he hoped that Dame Ruperta would be less diffuse than Dame Perrine, and that she

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would have finished so early that he might hear her story and still keep his appointment.

This is what Ruperta had to tell.

Dame Perrine's narrative ran in her head all night long, and from the moment that she entered her bedroom she trembled in every limb lest Antonia's spirit should pay her a visit, notwithstanding the blessed relics which hung about her bed.

She barricaded her door, but that was a very inadequate precaution; the old servant was too well versed in the ways of phantoms not to be aware that they know nothing of closed doors. Nevertheless she would have liked also to barricade the window looking upon the garden of the Grand-Nesle, but the original proprietor had neglected to provide the window with shutters, and the present proprietor deemed it useless to burden himself with that expense.

Ordinarily there were curtains at the window; but at this time, as luck would have it, they were at the laundry. The window offered no protection, therefore, save an unpretentious pane of glass, as transparent as the air that it excluded.

On entering the room Ruperta looked under the bed, felt in all the drawers and closets, and did not leave a single corner uninspected. She knew that the devil occupies but little space when he draws in his tail and claws and horns, and that Asmodeus was corked up in a bottle for nobody knows how many years.

The room was entirely untenanted, and there was not the slightest trace of the ghostly monk.

Ruperta went to bed therefore somewhat more at ease, but she left her lamp burning none the less. She was no sooner in bed than she looked toward the window, and saw outside the window a gigantic figure, whose

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outlines were just discernible in the darkness, and which intercepted the light of the stars. The moon was invisible as it was in its last quarter.

Good Ruperta shivered with fear; she was on the point of crying out or knocking, when she remembered the colossal statue of Mars which reared its head before her window. She immediately looked again in that direction, and recognized perfectly all the outlines of the god of war. This reassured Ruperta for the moment, and she determined positively to go to sleep.

But sleep, the poor man's treasure so often coveted by the rich, is at no man's orders. At night God opens heaven's gates for him, and the capricious rascal visits whom he pleases, turning aside disdainfully from him who calls, and knocking at their doors who least expect him. Ruperta invoked him long before he paid heed to her.

At last, toward midnight, fatigue won the day. Little by little, the good woman's faculties became confused, her thoughts which were in general but ill connected, broke the imperceptible thread which held them, and scattered like the beads of a rosary. Her heart alone, distraught by fear, was still awake; at last it too fell fast asleep, and all was said; the lamp alone kept vigil.

But, like all things of earth, the lamp found rest two hours after Ruperta had closed her eyes in the sleep of the just. Upon the pretext that it had no oil to burn, it began to grow dim, sputtered, blazed up for an instant, and then died.

Just at that time Ruperta had a fearful dream; she dreamed that, as she was returning home from visiting Perrine, the ghostly monk pursued her; but happily, against all precedents of those who dream, Ruperta to

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her joy found that she had the legs of fifteen years, and fled so swiftly that the ghostly monk, although he seemed to glide and not to run over the ground, only arrived in time to have the door slammed in his face. Ruperta thought, still dreaming, that she heard him snarl and pound upon the door. But, as may be imagined, she was in no haste to let him in. She lit her lamp, ran up the stairs four at a time, jumped into bed, and put out the light.

But, just as she put out the light, she saw the monk's head outside her window; he had crawled up the wall like a lizard, and was trying to come through the glass. In her dream, she heard the grinding of his nails against it.

No sleep can be so sound as to hold out against a dream of that sort. Ruperta awoke with her hair standing on end, and dripping with icy perspiration. Her eyes were open, staring wildly around, and in spite of her they sought the window. With that she uttered a fearful shriek, for this is what she saw.

She saw the head of the colossal Mars shooting forth flame from its eyes and nose and mouth and ears.

She thought at first that she was still asleep, and that it was a continuation of her dream; but she pinched herself till the blood came to make sure that she was really awake; she crossed herself, and repeated mentally three *Paters* and two *Aves*, and the extraordinary phenomena did not disappear.

Ruperta summoned strength enough to put out her hand, seize her broom, and pound against the ceiling with the handle thereof. Hermann slept in the room above hers, and she hoped that the sturdy Teuton would be aroused and hurry to her assistance. But in vain did Ruperta knock: Hermann gave no sign of life.

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Thereupon she changed the direction of her blows, and, instead of knocking on the ceiling to arouse Hermann, began to knock on the floor to arouse Pagolo, who slept in the room below.

But Pagolo was as deaf as Hermann, and Ruperta pounded to no purpose.

She then abandoned the vertical for the horizontal line. Ascanio was her neighbor, and she knocked on the partition with her broom-handle.

But all was silence in Ascanio's quarters, as in those of Hermann and Pagolo. It was evident that neither of the three was at home. In an instant it occurred to Ruperta that the monk had carried off all three of them.

As there was little consolation in this idea, Ruperta's terror waxed greater and greater, and, as she was certain that no one would come to her assistance, she thrust her head beneath the bedclothes and waited.

She waited an hour, an hour and a half, two hours perhaps, and as she heard no noise, she regained her courage in a measure, softly removed the sheet from her head, and ventured to look with one eye, then with both. The vision had disappeared. The head of Mars had gone out, and all was dark once more.

Although the silence and darkness were calculated to set her mind at rest, it will readily be understood that Dame Ruperta and slumber were at odds for the balance of the night. The poor woman lay, with her ear on the alert and both eyes wide open, until the first rays of dawn reflected on her window announced that the time for ghosts to walk had passed.

Now this is what Ruperta had to tell, and it must be said in her honor that her narrative produced an even deeper impression than that of the preceding night; its

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effect upon Dame Perrine and Hermann, Scozzone and Pagolo, was particularly noticeable. The two men essayed to make excuses for not hearing Ruperta, but their voices trembled so, and their embarrassment was so great, that Jacques Aubry roared with laughter. Dame Perrine and Scozzone, on the other hand, did not breathe a word. They turned red and pale by turns, so that, if it had been daylight and you could have followed upon their faces the reflection of what was taking place in their minds, you would have believed them at the point of death from apoplexy, and again from inanition, all within ten seconds.

"And so, Dame Perrrine," said Scozzone, who was the first to recover her self-possession, "you claim to have seen the monk's ghost walking in the garden of the Grand-Nesle?"

"As plainly as I see you, my child," was Dame Perrrine's reply.

"And you, Ruperta, saw the head of the Mars on fire?"

"I can see it still."

"Look you," said Dame Perrine, "the accursed ghost must have chosen the head of the statue for his domicile; and as a ghost must of course take a little exercise now and then like a natural being, he comes down at certain hours, walks hither and thither, and when he 's tired goes back into the head. Idols and spirits, you see, understand one another, like thieves on market day; they live in hell together, and this horrible false god Mars naturally enough offers his hospitality to the infernal monk."

"Pelieve you zo, Dame Perrine?" queried the innocent German.

"I am sure of it, Monsieur Hermann, sure of it."

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"It makes my flesh to greep, on my vord!" muttered Hermann with a shudder.

"So you believe in ghosts, Hermann?" asked Aubry.

"Ja, I do pelieve in tem."

Jacques Aubry shrugged his shoulders, but as he did so he determined to solve the mystery. It was the easiest thing in the world for one who, like himself, went in and out of the house as familiarly as if he were one of the family. He made up his mind, therefore, that he would go and see Gervaise the next day, but that on this evening he would remain at the Grand-Nesle until ten o'clock; at ten o'clock he would say good night to everybody and pretend to go away, but that he would remain within the precincts, climb a poplar, and make the acquaintance of the phantom from a hiding place among the branches.

Everything fell out as the student planned. He left the studio alone as usual, shut the door leading into the quay with a great noise to indicate that he had gone out, then ran rapidly to the foot of the poplar, seized the lowest branch, drew himself up to it by his wrists, and in an instant was at the top of the tree. There he was just on a level with the head of the statue, and overlooked both the Grand and Petit-Nesle, so that nothing could take place in the courtyard or garden of either unseen by him.

While Jacques Aubry was taking up his position on his lofty perch, a grand soirée was in progress at the Louvre, and all the windows were ablaze with light. Charles V. had finally decided to leave Fontainebleau, and venture within the walls of the capital, and the two sovereigns had entered Paris that same evening.

A gorgeous welcoming fête awaited the Emperor there. There was a banquet, gaming, and a ball. Gondolas

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lighted by colored lanterns glided up and down the Seine, laden with musicians, and made melodious pauses in front of the famous balcony, from which, thirty years later, Charles IX. was to fire upon his people, while boats gayly decked with flowers conveyed from one bank of the river to the other those guests who were on their way from the Faubourg Saint-Germain to the Louvre, or who were returning to the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Among the guests the Vicomte de Marmagne was naturally included.

As we have said, the Vicomte de Marmagne, a tall, pink-cheeked, insipid dandy, claimed to be a great destroyer of hearts. On this occasion he thought that a certain pretty little countess, whose husband happened to be with the army in Savoy, cast meaning glances at him; thereupon he danced with her, and fancied that her hand was not insensible to the pressure he ventured to bestow upon it. And so, when he saw the fair object of his thoughts leave the ball-room, he imagined, from the glance she gave him as she departed, that, like Galatea, she was flying toward the willows in the hope of being pursued. Marmagne therefore set out in pursuit, and as she lived in the vicinity of Rue Hautefeuille his course lay from the Louvre to the Tour de Nesle, and thence along the quay and through Rue des Grands-Augustins to Rue Saint-André. He was walking along the quay when he heard steps behind him.

It was about one o'clock in the morning. The moon, as we have said, was entering her last quarter, so that the night was quite dark. Among the rare moral qualities with which nature had endowed Marmagne, courage did not hold a prominent position. He began there-

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fore after a while to be somewhat disturbed by these footsteps, which seemed to be following his own, and quickened his gait, wrapping himself more closely than ever in his cloak, and instinctively grasping the hilt of his sword.

But the acceleration of speed profited him not; the steps behind governed themselves by his, and even seemed to gain upon him, so that, just as he passed the doorway of the church of the Augustins he realized that he should very soon be overtaken by his fellow traveller unless he quickened his pace still more to a racing speed. He was just about to adopt that extreme course when the sound of a voice mingled with the sound of the footsteps.

"Pardieu! my fine sir, you do well to walk fast," said the voice, "for this is n't a very safe place, especially at this hour; right here, you know of course, is where my worthy friend Benvenuto was attacked, — Benvenuto, the sublime artist, who is at Fontainebleau at this moment, and has no suspicion of what is going on under his roof. But as we are going in the same direction apparently, we can walk along together, and if we meet any cut-throats they will look twice before they attack us. I offer you therefore the safeguard of my companionship, if you will give me the honor of yours."

At the first word our student uttered, Marmagne knew that it was the voice of one who wished him no ill, and at the name of Benvenuto he remembered and recognized the garrulous law student, who had on a previous occasion given him so much useful information concerning the interior of the Grand-Nesle. He at once halted, and waited for master Jacques Aubry to come up, for his society would be of advantage to him

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in two ways. In the first place, he would serve as a sort of body guard, and might in the mean while give him some fresh information concerning his enemy, which his hatred would enable him to turn to advantage. He therefore welcomed the student with his most agreeable manner.

"Good evening, my young friend," he said, in reply to the familiar harangue addressed to him by Jacques Aubry in the darkness. "What were you saying of our good Benvenuto, whom I hoped to meet at the Louvre, but who has remained at Fontainebleau, like the fox that he is!"

"Well, by my soul, here 's luck!" cried Jacques Aubry. "What, is it you, my dear vicomte — de — You forgot to tell me your name, or I forgot to remember it. You come from the Louvre? Was it very lovely, very lively, with love-making galore? We are in good luck, my gentleman, are n't we? O you heart-breaker!"

"Faith!" said Marmagne with a simper, "you 're a sorcerer, my dear fellow; yes, I come from the Louvre, where the king said some very gracious things to me, and where I should still be if a certain fascinating little countess had not signified to me that she preferred a solitude *à deux* to all that crush. But whence come you?"

"Whence come I?" rejoined Aubry, with a hearty laugh. "Faith! you remind me! Poor Benvenuto! On my word, he does n't deserve it!"

"Pray what has happened to our dear friend?"

"In the first place, you must know that I come from the Grand-Nesle, where I have passed two hours clinging to the branch of a tree like any parrot."

"The devil! that was no very comfortable position!

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"Never mind, never mind! I don't regret the cramp I got there, for I saw things, my friend, I saw things — Why, simply in thinking of them I suffocate with laughter."

As he spoke Jacques Aubry did laugh, so joyously and frankly that, although Marmagne had as yet no idea what he was laughing at, he could not forbear joining in the chorus. But his ignorance of the cause of the student's amusement naturally made him the first to cease.

"Now, my young friend, that I have been drawn on by your hilarity to laugh in confidence," said Marmagne, "may I not know what wonderful things they were to amuse you so? You know that I am one of Benvenuto's faithful friends, although I have never met you at his house, as my occupation leaves me very little time to devote to society, and that little I prefer to devote to my mistresses rather than my friends, I confess. But it is none the less true that whatever affects him affects me. Dear Benvenuto! Tell me what is going on at the Grand-Nesle in his absence? That interests me more than I can explain to you."

"What is going on?" said Aubry. "No, no, that's a secret."

"A secret to me!" said Marmagne. "A secret to me, who love Benvenuto so dearly, and who this very evening outdid King François I. in eulogizing him! Ah! that is too bad," added the viscount, with an injured expression.

"If I were only sure that you would mention it to nobody, my dear — What the devil is your name, my dear friend? — I would tell you about it, for I confess that I am as anxious to tell my story as King Midas's reeds were to tell theirs."

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"Tell it then, tell it," said Marmagne.

"You won't repeat it to anybody?"

"To nobody, I swear!"

"On your word of honor?"

"On the faith of a nobleman."

"Fancy then — But, in the first place, my dear friend, you know the story of the monk's ghost, don't you?"

"Yes, I've heard of it. A phantom that is said to haunt the Grand-Nesle."

"Just so. Very well! if you know that, I can tell you the rest. Fancy that Dame Perrine — "

"Colombe's governess?"

"Just so. Well, well, it's easy to see that you're a friend of the family. Fancy then that Dame Perrine, in a nocturnal walk which she was taking for her health, thought that she saw the ghostly monk also taking a walk in the garden of the Grand-Nesle, while at the same time Dame Ruperta — You know Dame Ruperta?"

"Isn't she Cellini's old servant?"

"Just so. While Dame Ruperta, during one of her fits of sleeplessness, saw flames darting from the eyes, nose, and mouth of the great statue of Mars which you have seen in the gardens of the Grand-Nesle."

"Yes, a veritable *chef-d'œuvre!*" said Marmagne.

"*Chef-d'œuvre* is the word. Cellini makes nothing else. Now, these two respectable ladies — I speak of Dame Perrine and Dame Ruperta — agreed between themselves that the two apparitions had the same cause, and that the demon, who stalked abroad at night in the guise of the ghostly monk, ascended at cock-crow into the head of the god Mars, a fitting retreat for a lost soul like him, and was there consumed by such fierce flames

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that they came out through the statue's eyes, nose, and ears."

"What sort of a fairy tale is this, my dear man?" said Marmagne, unable to tell whether the student was joking or talking seriously.

"The tale of a ghost, my friend, nothing more nor less."

"Can it be that an intelligent fellow like you believes in such stuff?"

"Why no, I don't believe in it," said Jacques Aubry. "That is just why I concluded to pass the night in a poplar tree to clear up the mystery, and find out who the demon really is who is upsetting the whole household. So I pretended to come out, but instead of closing the door of the Grand-Nesle behind me I closed it in front of me, glided back in the darkness without being seen, and got safely to the poplar upon which I had my eye: five minutes later I was snugly ensconced among the branches on a level with Mars's head. Now guess what I saw."

"How can I guess, pray?"

"To be sure, one must be a sorcerer to guess such things. In the first place I saw the great door open; the door at the top of the steps, you know?"

"Yes, yes, I know it," said Marmagne.

"I saw the door open and a man put his nose out to see if there was any one in the courtyard. It was Hermann, the fat German."

"Yes, Hermann, the fat German," echoed Marmagne.

"When he was fully assured that the courtyard was deserted, having looked about everywhere, except in the tree, where, as you can imagine, he was very far from suspecting my presence, he came out, closed the door behind him, descended the five or six steps, and

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went straight to the door of the Petit-Nesle, where he knocked three times. At that signal a woman came out of the Petit-Nesle and opened the door. This woman was our friend Dame Perrine, who apparently has a weakness for walking about at night with our Goliath."

"No, really? Oh the poor provost!"

"Wait a moment, wait, that's not all! I was looking after them as they went into the Petit-Nesle, when suddenly I heard the grating of a window-sash at my left. I turned; the window opened and out came Pagolo, — that brigand of a Pagolo! — who would have believed it of him with all his protestations, and his Paters and Aves? — out came Pagolo, and, after looking about as cautiously as Hermann, straddled the window-sill, slid down the gutter, and went from balcony to balcony until he reached the window — guess of whose room, viscount!"

"How can I tell? was it Dame Ruperta's?"

"Oh no! Scozzone's, nothing less! Scozzone, Benvenuto's beloved model, — a lovely brunette, my word for it. Can you believe it of the rascal, viscount?"

"Indeed, it's most diverting," said Marmagne. "Is that all you saw?"

"Wait a bit, wait a bit, my dear fellow! I have kept the best till the last, the best morsel for the *bonne bouche;* wait a bit, we aren't there yet, but we soon shall be, never fear!"

"I am listening," said Marmagne. "On my honor, my dear fellow, it could n't be more diverting."

"Wait a bit, I say, wait a bit. I was watching my Pagolo running from balcony to balcony at the risk of breaking his neck, when I heard another noise, which came almost from the foot of the tree in which I was

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sitting. I looked down and saw Ascanio creeping stealthily along from the foundry."

"Ascanio, Benvenuto's beloved pupil?"

"Himself, my friend, himself. A sort of choir-boy, to whom one would give absolution without confession. Oh yes! that comes of trusting to appearances."

"Why had Ascanio come out?"

"Ah, that's just it! Why had he? that's what I asked myself at first, but soon I had no occasion to ask it; for Ascanio, after having made sure, as Hermann and Pagolo had done, that nobody could see him, took from the foundry a long ladder, which he rested against the shoulders of Mars, and up he climbed. As the ladder was on the opposite side from myself, I lost sight of him as he went up, and was just wondering what had become of him when I saw a light in the eyes of the statue."

"What's that you say?" cried Marmagne.

"The exact truth, my friend, and I confess that, if it had happened without any knowledge on my part of what had happened previously, I should not have been altogether at my ease. But I had seen Ascanio disappear, and I suspected that the light was caused by him."

"But what was Ascanio doing at that hour in the head of the god Mars?"

"Ah! that is just the question I asked myself, and as there was no one to answer me I determined to find out for myself. I gazed with all my eyes, and succeeded in discovering, through those of the statue, a ghost, i' faith! yes, dressed all in white; the ghost of a woman, at whose feet Ascanio was kneeling as respectfully as before a Madonna. Unfortunately, the Madonna's back was turned to me, and I could not see

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her face, but I saw her neck. Oh what lovely necks ghosts have, my dear viscount! Imagine a perfect swan's neck, white as snow. And Ascanio was gazing at it, the impious varlet! with a degree of adoration which convinced me that the ghost was a woman. What do you say to that, my dear fellow? Gad! it's a neat trick, eh? to conceal one's mistress in the head of a statue."

"Yes, yes, it's most ingenious," rejoined Marmagne, laughing and reflecting at the same time; "very ingenious, in good sooth. And you have no suspicion who the woman can be?"

"Upon my honor, I have no idea. And you?"

"No more than you. What did you do, pray, when you saw all this?"

"What did I do? I laughed so that I lost my balance, and if I had n't caught on a branch I should have broken my neck. As there was nothing more to see, and I had fallen half-way to the ground, I climbed down the rest of the way, crept to the door, and was on my way home, still laughing all by myself, when I met you, and you compelled me to tell you the story. Now, give me your advice, as you are of Benvenuto's friends. What must I do about telling him? As for Dame Perrine, that does n't concern him; the dear woman is of age, and consequently mistress of her actions; but as to Scozzone, and the Venus who lodges in the head of Mars, it's a different matter."

"And you want me to advise you as to what you ought to do?"

"Yes, I do indeed! I am much perplexed, my dear — my dear — I always forget your name."

"My advice is to say nothing to him. So much the worse for those who are foolish enough to allow them-

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selves to be deceived. I am obliged to you, Master Jacques Aubry, for your company and your agreeable conversation; but here we are at Rue Hautefeuille, and to return confidence for confidence, this is where my charmer dwells."

"Adieu, my dear, my excellent friend," said Jacques Aubry, pressing the viscount's hand. "Your advice is good and I will follow it. Good luck, and may Cupid watch over you!"

Thereupon they parted, Marmagne taking Rue Hautefeuille, and Jacques Aubry Rue Poupée, on his way to Rue de la Harpe, at the far end of which he had taken up his abode.

The viscount lied to the unlucky student when he declared that he had no suspicion as to the identity of the female demon whom Ascanio adored on his knees. His first thought was that the inhabitant of Mars was no other than Colombe, and the more he reflected upon it, the more firmly convinced he became. As we have said, Marmagne was equally ill disposed toward the provost, D'Orbec, and Cellini, and he found himself in a very awkward position as regarded the gratification of his ill will, for he could not inflict suffering upon one without giving pleasure to the others. If he held his peace, D'Orbec and the provost would remain in their present embarrassed plight; but Benvenuto would likewise continue in his present joyous frame of mind. If, on the other hand, he disclosed what he had learned, Benvenuto would be in despair, but the provost would recover his child, D'Orbec his betrothed. He determined, therefore, to turn the thing over in his mind until it should be made clear to him what was the most advantageous course for him to follow.

His indecision did not long endure; without know-

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ing the real motive for her interest, he was aware that Madame d'Etampes was deeply interested in the marriage of Comte d'Orbec with Colombe. He thought that, by revealing his secret to the duchess, he might gain sufficient credit for perspicacity to make up for what he had lost in the matter of courage; he resolved, therefore, to appear at her morning reception on the following day, and tell her everything. Having formed that resolution, he punctually put it in execution.

By one of those fortunate chances which sometimes serve the purpose of evil deeds so well, all the courtiers were at the Louvre, paying court to François I. and the Emperor, and there was nobody at Madame d'Etampes's reception save her two faithful servants, the provost and Comte d'Orbec, when the Vicomte de Marmagne was announced.

The viscount respectfully saluted the duchess, who acknowledged his salutation with one of those smiles which belonged to her alone, and in which she could express pride, condescension, and disdain all at the same time. But Marmagne did not worry about this smile, with which he was well acquainted from having seen it upon the duchess's lips not only for his own benefit, but for the benefit of many another. He knew moreover that he possessed a certain means of transforming that smile of contempt into a smile of good will by a single word.

"Aha! Messire d'Estourville," he said, turning to the provost, "so the prodigal child has returned?"

"Still the same pleasantry, Viscount!" cried Messire d'Estourville with a threatening gesture, and flushing with anger.

"Oh don't lose your temper, my good friend, don't lose your temper!" returned Marmagne; "I tell you

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this, because, if you have n't yet found your vanished dove, I know where she has built her nest."

"You do?" cried the duchess, in the most charmingly friendly way. "Where is it, pray? Tell me quickly, I beg, my dear Marmagne?"

"In the head of the statue of Mars, which Benvenuto has modelled in the garden of the Grand-Nesle."

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IX.

MARS AND VENUS.

THE reader will doubtless have guessed the truth, no less accurately than Marmagne, strange as it may have appeared at first glance. The head of the colossus was Colombe's place of retreat. Mars furnished apartments for Venus, as Jacques Aubry said. For the second time Benvenuto gave his handiwork a part to play in his life, summoned the artist to the assistance of the man, and embodied his fate in his statues as well as his thought and his genius. He had on an earlier occasion concealed his means of escape in one of his figures; he was now concealing Colombe's freedom and Ascanio's happiness in another.

But, having reached this point in our narrative, it becomes necessary for greater clearness to retrace our steps a moment.

When Cellini finished the story of Stefana, there was a brief pause. Benvenuto saw, among the phantoms which stood out vividly in his painful, obtrusive memories of the past, the melancholy, but serene features of Stefana, twenty years dead. Ascanio, with head bent forward, was trying to recall the pale face of the woman who had leaned over his cradle and often awoke him in his infancy, while the tears fell from her sad eyes upon his chubby cheeks. Colombe was gazing

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with deep emotion at Benvenuto, whom another woman, young and pure like herself, had loved so dearly: at that moment his voice seemed to her almost as soft as Ascanio's, and between the two, both of whom loved her devotedly, she felt instinctively that she was as safe as a child could be upon its mother's knee.

Benvenuto was the first to break the silence.

"Well!" he said, "will Colombe trust herself to the man to whom Stefana intrusted Ascanio?"

"You are my father, he my brother," replied Colombe, giving a hand to each of them with modest grace and dignity, "and I place myself blindly in your hands to keep me for my husband."

"Thanks," said Ascanio, "thanks, my beloved, for your trust in him."

"You promise to obey me in everything, Colombe?" said Benvenuto.

"In everything."

"Then listen, my children. I have always been convinced that man could do what he would, but only with the assistance of God on high and time here below. To save you from Comte d'Orbec and infamy, and to give you to my Ascanio, I must have time, Colombe, and in a very few days you are to be the count's wife. First of all then the essential thing is to delay this unholy union, is it not, Colombe, my sister, my child, my daughter? There are times in this sad life when it is necessary to do wrong in order to prevent a crime. Will you be courageous and resolute? Will your love, which is so pure and devoted, be brave and strong as well? Tell me."

"Ascanio will answer for me," said Colombe, with a smile, turning to the youth. "It is his right to dispose of me."

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"Have no fear, master: Colombe will be brave," said Ascanio.

"In that case, Colombe, will you, trusting in our loyalty and your own innocence, boldly leave this house and go with us?"

Ascanio started in surprise. Colombe looked at them both for a moment without speaking, then rose to her feet, and said simply, —

"Where am I to go?"

"O Colombe, Colombe!" cried Benvenuto, deeply moved by such absolute trust, "you are a noble, saintly creature, and yet Stefana made me very exacting in my ideal. Everything depended upon your reply. We are saved now, but there is n't a moment to lose. This is the decisive hour. God places it at our disposal, let us avail ourselves of it. Give me your hand, Colombe, and follow me."

The maiden lowered her veil as if to hide her blush from itself, then followed the master and Ascanio. The door between the Grand and Petit-Nesle was locked, but the key was in the lock. Benvenuto opened it noiselessly.

When they were passing through, Colombe stopped.

"Wait a moment," she said in a voice trembling with emotion; and upon the threshold of the house which she was leaving because it had ceased to be a sanctuary for her, the child knelt and prayed. Her prayer remained a secret between God and herself; but doubtless she prayed that he would forgive her father for what she was driven to do. Then she rose, calm and strong, and went on under the guidance of Cellini. Ascanio with troubled heart followed them in silence, gazing fondly at the white dress which fled before him in the shadow. They walked in this way across the

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garden of the Grand-Nesle; the songs and heedless, joyous laughter of the workmen at their supper, for it will be remembered that it was a holiday at the château, reached the ears of our friends, who were anxious and nervous as people ordinarily are at supreme moments.

When they reached the foot of the statue, Benevenuto left Colombe a moment, went to the foundry, and reappeared, laden with a long ladder which he leaned against the colossus. The moon, the celestial watcher, cast her pale light upon the scene. Having made sure that the ladder was firmly fixed in its place, the master knelt upon one knee in front of Colombe. The most touching respect softened the sternness of his expression.

"My child," said he, "put your arms around me, and hold fast."

Colombe obeyed without a word, and Benvenuto lifted her as if she had been a feather.

"The brother," he said to Ascanio as he drew near, "must allow the father to carry his beloved daughter."

The powerful goldsmith, laden with the most precious of all burdens, started up the ladder as lightly as if he were carrying nothing heavier than a bird. As her head lay upon the master's shoulder, Colombe could watch his manly, good-humored face, and felt a degree of filial trust in him which was unlike anything she had ever experienced. As to Cellini, so powerful was the will of this man of iron, that he was able to hold her in his arms, for whom he would have given his life two hours earlier, with a hand that did not tremble, nor did his heart beat more rapidly or a single one of his muscles of steel weaken for an instant. He had ordered his heart to be calm, and his heart had obeyed.

When he reached the neck of the statue he opened a

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small door, entered the head, and deposited Colombe therein.

The interior of this colossal head of a statue nearly sixty feet high formed a small round room some eight feet in diameter, and ten feet high; air and light made their way in through the openings for the eyes, nose, mouth, and ears. This miniature apartment Benvenuto made when he was working at the head; he used it as a receptacle for the tools he was using, so that he need not be at the trouble of taking them up and down five or six times a day; often too he carried up his lunch with him and set it out upon a table which stood in the centre of this unqiue dining-room, so that he had not to leave his scaffolding to take his morning meal. This innovation which was so convenient for him, made the place attractive to him; he followed up the table with a cot-bed, and latterly he had formed the habit of taking his noon-day siesta in the head of his Mars, as well as of breakfasting there. It was quite natural, therefore, that it should occur to him to ensconce Colombe in what was clearly the most secure hiding-place of all he could offer her.

"This is where you must remain, Colombe," said Benvenuto, "and you must make up your mind to go down only after dark. Await here in this retreat, under God's eye and our watchful care, the result of my efforts. Jupiter," he added with a smile, alluding to the king's promise, "will finish, I trust, what Mars has begun. You don't understand, but I know what I mean. We have Olympus on our side, and you have Paradise. How can we not succeed? Come, smile a little, Colombe, for the future at least, if not for the present. I tell you in all seriousness that we have ground for hope. Hope therefore with confidence,—

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in God, if not in me. I have been in a sterner prison than yours, believe me, and my hope made me indifferent to my captivity. From now until the day that success crowns my efforts, Colombe, you will see me no more. Your brother Ascanio, who is less suspected and less closely watched than I am, will come to see you, and will stand guard over you. I rely upon him to transform this workman's chamber into a nun's cell. Now that I am about to leave you, mark well and remember my words: you have done all that you had to do, trustful and courageous child; the rest concerns me. We have now only to allow Providence time to do its part, Colombe. Now listen. Whatever happens remember this: however desperate your situation may seem to be or may really be, even though you stand at the altar and have naught left to say but the terrible Yes which would unite you forever to Comte d'Orbec, do not doubt your friend, Colombe; do not doubt your father, my child; rely upon God and upon us; I will arrive in time, I promise you. Will you have the requisite faith and resolution? Tell me."

"Yes," said the girl confidently.

"'T is well," said Cellini. "Adieu. I leave you now in your solitude; when everybody is asleep, Ascanio will come and bring you what you need. Adieu, Colombe."

He held out his hand, but Colombe gave him her forehead to kiss as she was accustomed to do with her father. Benvenuto started, but, passing his hand over his eyes, he mastered the thoughts which came to his mind and the passions which raged in his heart, and deposited upon that spotless forehead the most paternal of kisses.

"Adieu, dear child of Stefana," he whispered, and

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went quickly down the ladder to Ascanio, with whom he joined the workmen, who had finished eating, but were drinking still.

A new life, a strange, dream-like life, thereupon began for Colombe, and she accommodated herself to it as she would have done to the life of a queen.

Let us see how the aerial chamber was furnished. It had already, as we know, a bed and a table. Ascanio added a low velvet chair, a Venetian mirror, a collection of religious books selected by Colombe herself, a crucifix,— a marvellous piece of carving, — and a silver vase, also from the master's hand, which was filled every night with fresh flowers. There was room for nothing more in the white shell, which contained so much of innocence and charm.

Colombe ordinarily slept during the day. Ascanio had advised that course for fear that, if she were awake, she might thoughtlessly do something that would betray her presence. She awoke with the stars and the nightingale's song, knelt upon her bed, in front of her crucifix, and remained for some time absorbed in fervent prayer; then she made her toilet, dressed her lovely, luxuriant hair, and sat and mused. Erelong a ladder would be placed against the statue and Ascanio would knock at the little door. If Colombe's toilet was completed, she would admit him and he would remain with her until midnight. At midnight, if the weather was fine, she would go down into the garden, and Ascanio would return to the Grand-Nesle for a few hours' sleep, while Colombe took her nightly walk, beginning once more the old dreams she used to dream in her favorite path, and which seemed now more likely to be fulfilled. After about two hours the white apparition would return to her snug retreat, where she

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would wait for daylight and her bedtime, inhaling the sweet odor of the flowers she had collected for her little nest, and listening to the singing of the nightingales in the Petit-Nesle, and the crowing of the cocks in the Pré-aux-Clercs.

Just before dawn Ascanio would return to his beloved once more, bringing her daily supply of provisions, adroitly subtracted from Dame Ruperta's larder by virtue of Cellini's complicity. Then they would sit for a while, conversing as only lovers can converse, evoking memories of the past, and forming plans for the future when they should be man and wife. Sometimes Ascanio would sit silently contemplating Colombe, and Colombe would meet his earnest gaze with her sweet smile. Often when they parted they had not exchanged a single word, but those were the occcasions on which they said most. Had not each of them in his or her heart all that the other could have said, in addition to what the heart cannot say, but God reads?

Grief and solitude have this advantage in youth, that, while they make the heart nobler and greater, they preserve its freshness. Colombe, a proud, dignified maiden, was at the same time a light-hearted young madcap: so there were days when they laughed as well as days when they dreamed, — days when they played together like children; and, most astonishing thing of all, those days — or nights, for, as we have seen, the young people had inverted the order of nature — were not the ones that passed most quickly. Love, like every other shining thing, needs a little darkness to make its light shine the brighter.

Never did Ascanio utter a word that could alarm the timid, innocent child who called him brother. They were alone, and they loved each other; but for the very

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reason that they were alone they were the more conscious of the presence of God, whose heaven they saw nearer at hand, and for the very reason that they loved each other, they respected their love as a divinity.

As soon as the first rays of dawn began to cast a feeble light upon the roofs of the houses, Colombe regretfully sent her friend away, but called him back as many times as Juliet did Romeo. One or the other had always forgotten something of the greatest importance; however, they had to part at last, and Colombe, up to the moment, toward noon, when she committed her heart to God, and slept the sleep of the angels, would sit alone, and dream, listening to the voices whispering in her heart, and to the little birds singing under the lindens in her old garden. It goes without saying that Ascanio always carried the ladder away with him.

Every morning she strewed bread around the mouth of the statue for the little birds; the bold-faced little fellows would come and seize it, and fly quickly away again at first; but they gradually grew tame. Birds seem to understand the hearts of young girls, who are winged like themselves. They finally would remain for a long while, and would pay in song for the banquet with which Colombe regaled them. There was one audacious goldfinch who ventured within the room, and finally acquired the habit of eating from Colombe's hand at morning and evening. When the nights began to be a little cool, one night he allowed himself to be taken captive by the young prisoner, who put him in her bosom, and there he slept until morning, notwithstanding Ascanio's visit and Colombe's nightly promenade. After that the willing captive never failed to return at night. At daybreak he would begin to sing:

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Colombe would then hold him for Ascanio to kiss, and set him at liberty.

Thus did Colombe's days glide by in the head of the statue. Only two things occurred to disturb the tranquillity of her existence; those two things were the provost's domiciliary visits. Once Colombe awoke with a start at the sound of her father's voice. It was no dream; he was down in the garden beneath her, and Benvenuto was saying to him: "You ask what this colossal figure is, Monsieur d'Estourville? It is the statue of Mars, which his Majesty condescended to order for Fontainebleau. A little bauble sixty feet high, as you see!"

"It is of noble proportions, and very beautiful," replied D'Estourville; "but let us go on, this is not what I am in search of."

"No, it would be too easy to find."

And they passed on.

Colombe, kneeling with outstretched arms, felt an intense longing to cry out, "Father, father, I am here!" The old man was seeking his child, weeping for her perhaps; but the thought of Comte d'Orbec, the hateful schemes of Madame d'Etampes, and the memory of the conversation Ascanio overheard, paralyzed her impulse. And on the second visit the same impulse did not come to her when the voice of the odious count was mingled with the provost's.

"There's a curious statue built just like a house," said D'Orbec, as he halted at the foot of the colossus. "If it stands through the winter, the swallows will build their nests in it in the spring."

On the morning of the day when the mere voice of her *fiancé* so alarmed Colombe, Ascanio had brought her a letter from Cellini.

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"My child," so ran the letter, "I am obliged to go away, but have no fear. I leave everything prepared for your deliverance and your happiness. The king's word guarantees my success, and the king you know has never been false to his word. From to-day your father also will be absent. Do not despair. I have now had all the time that I needed. Therefore I say to you again, dear girl, though you should be at the church door, though you should be kneeling at the altar, and on the point of uttering the words which bind you for life, let things take their course. Providence will intervene in time, I swear to you. Adieu.

"Your father,

"BENVENUTO CELLINI."

This letter, which filled Colombe's heart with joy by reviving her hopes, had the unfortunate result of causing the poor children to feel a dangerous sense of security. Youth is incapable of moderate feelings: it leaps at one bound from despair to the fullest confidence; in its eyes the sky is always black with tempests or resplendently clear. Being rendered doubly confident by the provost's absence and Cellini's letter, they neglected their precautions, and thought more of their love and less of prudence. Colombe was not so guarded in her movements, and Dame Perrine saw her, but luckily mistook her for the monk's ghost. Ascanio lighted the lamp without drawing the curtains, and the light was seen by Dame Ruperta. The tales of the two gossips taken in conjunction aroused the curiosity of Jacques Aubry, and the indiscreet student, like Horace in the "Ecole des Femmes," revealed everything to the very person to whom he should have revealed absolutely nothing. We know the result of his disclosures.

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Let us now return to the Hôtel d'Etampes.

When Marmagne was asked how he had stumbled upon his valuable discovery, he assumed an air of mystery and refused to tell. The truth was too simple, and did not reflect sufficient credit upon his penetration; he preferred to let it be understood that he had arrived at the magnificent results which aroused their wonder by dint of strategy and perseverance. The duchess was radiant; she went and came, and plied the viscount with questions. So they had her at last, the little rebel who had terrified them all! Madame d'Etampes determined to go in person to the Hôtel de Nesle to make sure of her friend's good fortune. Moreover, after what had happened after the flight, or rather the abduction, of Colombe, the girl must not be left at the Petit-Nesle. The duchess would take charge of her: she would take her to the Hôtel d'Etampes, and would keep a closer watch upon her than duenna and *fiancé* together had done; she would keep watch upon her as a rival, so that Colombe would surely be well guarded.

The duchess ordered her litter.

"The affair has been kept very secret," said she to the provost. "You, D'Orbec, are not the man to worry about a childish escapade of this sort? I don't see, then, what is to prevent the marriage from taking place, and our plans from being carried out."

"On the same conditions, of course, duchess?" said D'Orbec.

"To be sure, on the same conditions, my dear count. As to Benvenuto," continued the duchess, "who is guilty, either as principal or accessory, of an infamous abduction, — never fear, dear viscount, we will avenge you, while avenging ourselves."

"But I understand, madame," rejoined Marmagne,

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"that the king in his artistic enthusiasm had made him a solemn promise, in case the statue of his Jupiter should be cast successfully, so that he will simply have to breathe a wish to see his wish gratified."

"Never fear, that's just where I will watch," rejoined the duchess; "I will prepare a surprise for him on that day that will be a surprise indeed. So rely upon me, and let me manage everything."

That was in truth the best thing they could do: not for a long while had the duchess seemed so eager, so animated, so charming. Her joy overflowed in spite of her. She sent the provost away in hot haste to summon his archers, and erelong that functionary, accompanied by D'Orbec and Marmagne, and preceded by a number of subordinates, arrived at the door of the Hôtel de Nesle, followed at a short distance by Madame d'Etampes, who waited upon the quay, trembling with impatience, and constantly thrusting her head out of the litter.

It was the dinner hour of the workmen, and Ascanio, Pagolo, little Jehan, and the women were the only occupants of the Grand-Nesle at the moment. Benvenuto was not expected until the evening of the following day, or the morning of the day following that. Ascanio, who received the visitors, supposed that it was a third domciliary visit, and, as he had very positive orders from the master on that subject, he offered no resistance, but welcomed them, on the other hand, most courteously.

The provost, his friends and his retainers, went straight to the foundry.

"Open this door for us," said D'Estourville to Ascanio.

The young man's heart was oppressed with a terrible

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presentiment. However he might be mistaken, and as the least hesitation might awaken suspicion, he handed the provost the key without moving a muscle.

"Take that long ladder," said the provost to his archers.

They obeyed, and under Messire d'Estourville's guidance marched straight to the statue. There the provost himself put the ladder in place, and prepared to ascend, but Ascanio, pale with terror and wrath placed his foot on the first round.

"What is your purpose, messieurs?" he cried; "this statue is the master's masterpiece. It has been placed in my charge, and the first man who lays hand upon it for any purpose whatsoever is a dead man, I warn you!"

He drew from his belt a keen-edged, slender dagger, of such marvellous temper that it would cut through a gold crown at a single blow.

The provost gave a signal and his archers advanced upon Ascanio pike in hand. He made a desperate resistance and wounded two men; but he could do nothing alone against eight, leaving the provost, Marmagne, and D'Orbec out of the reckoning. He was forced to yield to superior numbers: he was thrown down, bound and gagged, and the provost started up the ladder, followed by two sergeants for fear of a surprise.

Colombe had heard and seen everything; her father found her in a swoon, for when she saw Ascanio fall she believed him to be dead.

Aroused to anger rather than anxiety by this sight, the provost threw Colombe roughly over his broad shoulders, and descended the ladder. The whole party then returned to the quay, the archers escorting Ascanio, at whom D'Orbec gazed most earnestly. Pagolo saw

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his comrade pass and did not stir. Little Jehan had disappeared. Scozzone alone, understanding nothing of what had taken place, tried to bar the door, crying, —

"What means this violence, messieurs? Why are you taking Ascanio away? Who is this woman?"

But at that moment the veil which covered Colombe's face fell off, and Scozzone recognized the model for the statue of Hebe.

Thereupon she stood aside, pale with jealousy, and allowed the provost and his people, as well as their prisoners, to pass without another word.

"What does this mean, and why have you abused this boy so?" demanded Madame d'Etampes, when she saw Ascanio bound, and pale and covered with blood. "Unbind him! unbind him!"

"Madame," said the provost, "this same boy resisted us desperately; he wounded two of my men; he is his master's accomplice without doubt, and it seems to me advisable to take him to some safe place."

"And furthermore," said D'Orbec in an undertone to the duchess, "he so strongly resembles the Italian page I saw at your reception, and who was present throughout our conversation, that, if he were not dressed differently, and if I had not heard him speak the language which you assured me the page could not understand, upon my honor, Madame la Duchesse, I would swear it was he!"

"You are right, Monsieur le Prévôt," said Madame d'Etampes hastily, thinking better of the order she had given to set Ascanio at liberty; "you are right, this young man may be dangerous. Make sure of his person."

"To the Châtelet with the prisoner," said the provost.

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"And we," said the duchess, at whose side Colombe, still unconscious, had been placed, — "we, messieurs, will return to the Hôtel d'Etampes!"

A moment later the hoof-beats of a galloping horse rang out upon the pavement. It was little Jehan, riding off at full speed to tell Cellini what had taken place at the Hôtel de Nesle.

Ascanio, meanwhile, was committed to the Châtelet without having seen the duchess, and in ignorance of the part played by her in the event which destroyed his hopes.

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X.

THE RIVALS.

MADAME D'ETAMPES, who had been so desirous to see Colombe at close quarters ever since she had first heard of her, had her heart's desire at last: the poor child lay there before her in a swoon.

The jealous duchess did not once cease to gaze at her throughout the whole journey to the Hôtel d'Etampes. Her eyes, blazing with anger when she saw how beautiful she was, scrutinized each of her charms, analyzed each feature, and passed in review one after another all the elements which went to make up the perfect beauty of the pale-cheeked girl who was at last in her power and under her hand. The two women, who were inspired with the same passion and disputing possession of the same heart, were face to face at last. One all-powerful and malevolent, the other weak, but beloved; one with her splendor, the other with her youth; one with her passion, the other with her innocence. Separated by so many obstacles, they had finally come roughly in contact, and the duchess's velvet robe brushed against Colombe's simple white gown.

Though Colombe was in a swoon, Anne was not the least pale of the two. Doubtless her mute contemplation of her companion's loveliness caused her pride to despair, and destroyed her hopes; for while, in her own

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despite, she murmured, "They told me truly, she is lovely, very lovely!" her hand, which held Colombe's, pressed it so convulsively that the young girl was brought to her senses by the pain, and opened her great eyes, saying, —

"Oh, madame, you hurt me!"

As soon as the duchess saw that Colombe's eyes were open, she let her hand fall. But the consciousness of pain preceded the return of the faculty of thought. For some seconds after she uttered the words, she continued to gaze wonderingly at the duchess, as if she could not collect her thoughts.

"Who are you, madame," she said at last, "and whither are you taking me?" Then she suddenly drew away from her, crying, —

"Ah! you are the Duchesse d'Etampes. I remember, I remember!"

"Hush!" returned Anne imperiously. "Hush! Soon we shall be alone, and you can wonder and cry out at your ease."

These words were accompanied by a stern, haughty glance; but it was a sense of her own dignity, and not the glance, which imposed silence upon Colombe. She said not another word until they reached the Hôtel d'Etampes, where, at a sign from the duchess, she followed her to her oratory.

When the rivals were at last alone and face to face, they eyed each other for one or two minutes without speaking, but with very different expressions. Colombe was calm, for her trust in Providence and in Benvenuto sustained her. Anne was furious at her calmness, but although her fury was clearly evidenced by the contortion of her features, she did not give expression to it, for she relied upon her imperious will, and her un-

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bounded power to crush the feeble creature before her. She was the first to break the silence.

"Well, my young friend," she said, in a tone which left no doubt as to the bitterness of the thought, although the words were soft, "you are restored to your father, at last. It is well, but allow me first of all to compliment you upon your courage; you are — bold for your age, my child."

"I have God on my side, madame," rejoined Colombe simply.

"What god do you refer to, mademoiselle? Oh, the god Mars, of course!" returned the duchess with one of those impertinent winks which she so often had occasion to resort to at court.

"I know but one God, madame; the Eternal God, merciful and protecting, who teaches charity in prosperity, and humility in grandeur. Woe to them who know not the God of whom I speak, for there will come a day when He will not know them."

"Very good, mademoiselle, very good!" said the duchess. "The situation is admirably adapted for a moral lecture, and I would congratulate you upon your happy choice of a subject if I did not prefer to think that you are trying to excuse your wantonness by impudence."

"In truth, madame," replied Colombe, without bitterness, but with a slight shrug of the shoulders, "I do not seek to excuse myself to you, because I am as yet ignorant of any right on your part to accuse me. When my father chooses to question me, I shall reply with respect and sorrow. If he reproves me I will try to justify myself; but until then, Madame la Duchesse, permit me to hold my peace."

"I understand that my voice annoys you, and you

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would prefer, would you not, to remain alone with your thoughts and think at leisure of the man you love?"

"No noise, however annoying it may be, can prevent me from thinking of him, madame, especially when he is unhappy."

"You dare confess that you love him?"

"That is the difference between us, madame; you love him, and dare not confess it."

"Impudent hussy!" cried the duchess, "upon my word I believe she defies me."

"Alas! no," replied Colombe softly, "I do not defy you, I reply, simply because you force me to reply. Leave me alone with my thoughts, and I will leave you alone with your schemes."

"Very good! since you drive me to it, child, since you imagine that you are strong enough to contend with me, since you confess your love, I will confess mine; but at the same time I will confess my hatred. Yes, I love Ascanio, and I hate you! After all, why should I dissemble with you, the only person to whom I may say whatever I choose? for you are the only one who, whatever you say, will not be believed. Yes, I love Ascanio."

"In that case I pity you, madame," rejoined Colombe softly, "for Ascanio loves me."

"Yes, it is true, Ascanio does love you; but by seduction if I can, by falsehood if I must, by a crime if it becomes necessary, I will steal his love away from you, mark that! I am Anne d'Heilly, Duchesse d'Etampes!"

"Ascanio, madame, will love the one who loves him best."

"In God's name hear her!" cried the duchess, exasperated by such sublime confidence. "Would not one

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think that her love is unique, and that no other love can be compared to it?"

"I do not say that, madame. For the reason that I love, I know that other hearts may love as I do, but I doubt if yours is one of them."

"What would you do for him? Come, let us see, you who boast of this love of yours which mine can never equal. What have you sacrificed for him thus far? an obscure life and wearisome solitude?"

"No, madame, but my peace of mind."

"You have given him preference over what? Comte d'Orbec's absurd love?"

"No, madame, but my filial obedience."

"What have you to give him? Can you make him rich, powerful, feared?"

"No, madame, but I hope to make him happy."

"Ah!" exclaimed the duchess; "it's a very different matter with me, and I do much more for him: I sacrifice a king's affection; I lay wealth, titles, and honors at his feet; I bring him a kingdom to govern."

"Yes," said Colombe with a smile, "it 's true that your love gives him everything that is not love."

"Enough, enough of this insulting comparison!" cried the duchess violently, feeling that she was losing ground step by step.

Thereupon ensued a momentary pause, during which Colombe seemed to feel no embarrassment, while Madame d'Etampes succeeded in concealing hers only by revealing her anger. However, her features gradually relaxed, her face assumed a milder expression, lightened by a gleam of real or feigned benevolence. She was the first to reopen the conflict which she did not propose should end otherwise than in a triumph.

"Let us see, Colombe," said she in a tone that was

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almost affectionate, "if some one should bid you sacrifice your life for him, what would you do?"

"Ah! I would give it to him blissfully!"

"And so would I!" cried the duchess with an accent which proved the violence of her passion, if not the sincerity of the sacrifice.

"But your honor," she continued, "would you sacrifice that as well as your life?"

"If by my honor you mean my reputation, yes; if by my honor you mean my virtue, no."

"What! you do not belong to him? is he not your lover?"

"He is my *fiancé*, madame; that is all."

"Oh, she does n't love him!" rejoined the duchess, "she does n't love him! She prefers her honor, a mere empty word, to him."

"If some one were to say to you, madame," retorted Colombe, angered in spite of her sweet disposition, "if some one were to say to you, 'Renounce for his sake your titles and your grandeur; abandon the king for him, — not in secret, that would be too easy, — but publicly.' If some one were to say to you, 'Anne d'Heilly, Duchesse d'Etampes, leave your palace, your luxurious surroundings, and your courtiers for his humble artist's studio'?"

"I would refuse in his own interest," replied the duchess, as if it were impossible to say what was false beneath the profound, penetrating gaze of her rival.

"You would refuse?"

"Yes."

"Ah! she does n't love him!" cried Colombe; "she prefers honors, mere chimeras, to him."

"But when I tell you that I wish to retain my position for his sake," returned the duchess, exasperated

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anew by this fresh triumph of her rival, — "when I tell you that I wish to retain my honors so that he may share them? All men care for them sooner or later."

"Yes," replied Colombe, smiling; "but Ascanio is not one of them."

"Hush!" cried Anne, stamping her foot in passion.

Thus had the cunning and powerful duchess signally failed to gain the upper hand over a mere girl, whom she expected to intimidate simply by raising her voice. To her questions, angry or satirical, Colombe had made answer with a modest tranquillity which disconcerted her. She realized that the blind impulsion of her hatred had led her astray, so she changed her tactics. To tell the truth, she had not reckoned upon the possession of so much beauty or so much wit by her rival, and, finding that she could not bend her, she determined to take her by surprise.

Colombe as we have seen, was not alarmed by the double explosion of Madame d'Etampes's wrath, but simply took refuge in cold and dignified silence. The duchess, however, following out the new plan she had adopted, now approached her with her most fascinating smile, and took her affectionately by the hand.

"Forgive me, my child," she said, "but I fear I lost my temper; you must not bear me ill will for it; you have the advantage of me in so many ways, that it 's natural that I should be jealous. Alas! you, no doubt, like everybody else, consider me a wicked woman. But, in truth, my destiny is at fault, not I. Forgive me, therefore; because we both happen to love Ascanio is no reason why we should hate each other. And then he loves you alone, so 't is your duty to be indulgent. Let us be sisters, what say you? Let us talk frankly together, and I will try to efface from your

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mind the unfortunate impression which my foolish anger may have left there."

"Madame!" said Colombe, with reserve, and withdrawing her hand with an instinctive movement of repulsion; but she added at once, "Speak, I am listening."

"Oh," said Madame d'Etampes playfully, and as if she understood perfectly her companion's reserve, "have no fear, little savage, I do not ask for your friendship without a guaranty. In order that you may know what manner of woman I am, that you may know me as I know myself, I propose to tell you in two words the story of my life. My heart has little to do with my story, and we poor women, who are called great ladies, are so often slandered! Ah! envy does very wrong to speak ill of us when we are fitter subjects for compassion. For instance, what is your judgment of me, my child? Be frank. You look upon me as a lost woman, do you not?"

Colombe made a gesture indicative of the embarrassment she felt at the idea of replying to such a question.

"But if I am a lost woman, is it my fault? You in your happiness, Colombe, must not be too hard upon those who have suffered, — you who have lived hitherto in innocent solitude, and do not know what it is to be reared upon ambitious dreams: for they who are destined to that torture, like victims decked out with flowers, see only the bright side of life. There is no question of love, simply of pleasing. So it was that from my earliest youth my thoughts were all bent upon fascinating the king; the beauty which God gives to woman to be exchanged for true love, I was forced to exchange for a title; they made of my charms a snare. Tell me now, Colombe, what could be the fate of a poor

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child, taken in hand before she has learned to know the difference between good and evil, and who is told, 'The good is evil, the evil is good'? And so, you see, although others despair of me, I do not despair of myself. Perhaps God will forgive me, for no one stood beside me to tell me of him. What was there for me to do, alone as I was, and weak and defenceless? Craft and deceit have made up my whole life from that time on. And yet I was not made to play such a hideous *rôle;* the proof is that I love Ascanio, and that when I found that I loved him I was happy and ashamed at the same time. Now tell me, my pure, darling child, do you understand me?"

"Yes," innocently replied Colombe, deceived by this false good faith, this lie masquerading in the guise of truth.

"Then you will have pity on me," cried the duchess; "you will let me love Ascanio from a distance, all by myself, hopelessly; and in that way I shall not be your rival, for he will not care for me; and, in return, I, who know the world and its snares, its pitfalls and deceit, will take the place of the mother you have lost. I will guide you, I will save you. Now you see that you can trust me, for you save my life. A child in whose heart the passions of a woman were sown, that in brief is my past. My present you see for yourself; it is the shame of being the declared mistress of a king. My future is my love for Ascanio,—not his for me, because, as you have said, and as I have very often told myself, Ascanio will never love me; but for the very reason that that love will remain pure it will purify me. Now it is your turn, to speak, to open your heart, to tell me everything. Tell me your story, dear girl."

"My story, madame, is very brief and very simple,"

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said Colombe; "it may all be summed up in three loves. I have loved, I love, and I shall love, — God, my father, and Ascanio. But in the past my love for Ascanio, whom I had not then met, was a dream; at present it is a cause of suffering; in the future, it is a hope."

"Very good," said the duchess, restraining her jealousy, and forcing back her tears; "but do not half confide in me, Colombe. What do you mean to do now? How can you, poor child, contend with two such powerful wills as your father's and Comte d'Orbec's? To say nothing of the king's having seen you and fallen in love with you."

"O mon Dieu!" murmured Colombe.

"But as this passion on the king's part was the work of the Duchesse d'Etampes, your rival, your friend, Anne d'Heilly will deliver you from it. So we won't disturb ourselves about the king: but your father and the count must be reckoned with. Their ambition is less easy to balk than the commonplace fancy of the king."

"Oh, do not be half kind!" cried Colombe; "save me from the others as well as from the king."

"I know but one way," said Madame d'Etampes, seeming to reflect.

"What is that?"

"You will take fright, and refuse to adopt it."

"Oh, if only courage is required, tell me what it is."

"Come here, and listen to me," said the duchess, affectionately drawing Colombe to a seat upon a stool beside her arm-chair, and passing her arm around her waist. "Don't be alarmed, I beg, at the first words I say."

"Is it very terrifying?" Colombe asked.

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"Your virtue is unbending, and unspotted, my dear little one, but we live, alas! at a time and in a society where such fascinating innocence is but a danger the more, for it places you, without means of defence, at the mercy of your enemies, whom you cannot fight with the weapons they use to attack you. So make an effort, descend from the heights to which your dreams have transported you, to the lower level of reality. You said just now that you would sacrifice your reputation for Ascanio. I do not ask so much as that, but simply that you sacrifice the appearance of fidelity to him. It is pure madness for you, alone and helpless, to struggle against your destiny: for you, the daughter of a gentleman, to dream of marriage with a goldsmith's apprentice! Come, trust the advice of a sincere friend; do not resist them, but let them have their way: remain at heart the spotless *fiancé*, the wife of Ascanio, and give your hand to Comte d'Orbec. His ambitious schemes require that you should bear his name; but once you are Comtesse d'Orbec, you can easily overturn his detestable schemes, for you have only to raise your voice and complain. Whereas now, who would take your part in the contest? No one: even I cannot assist you against the legitimate authority of a father, while, if it were a question of foiling your husband's combinations, you would soon see me at work. Reflect upon what I say. To remain your own mistress, obey; to become independent, pretend to abandon your liberty. Strong in the thought that Ascanio is your lawful husband, and that union with any other is mere sacrilege, you may do what your heart bids you, and your conscience will be at rest, while the world, in whose eyes appearances will be preserved, will take your part."

"Madame! madame!" murmured Colombe, rising and

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straightening herself against the duchess's arm, as she sought to detain her, "I am not sure that I understand you aright, but it seems to me that you are advising me to do an infamous thing!"

"What do you say?" cried the duchess.

"I say that virtue is not so subtle as all that, madame; I say that your sophistries make me blush for you; I say that beneath the cloak of friendship with which you conceal your hatred, I see the net you have spread for me. You wish to dishonor me in Ascanio's eyes, do you not, because you know that Ascanio will never love or will cease to love the woman he despises?"

"Well, yes!" said the duchess, bursting forth at last; "I am weary of wearing a mask. Ah! you will not fall into the net I have spread, you say? Very good, then you will fall into the abyss I will push you into. Hear this: Whether you will or no, you shall marry D'Orbec!"

"In that case the force put upon me will be my excuse, and by yielding, if I do yield, I shall not have profaned my heart's religion."

"Pray, do you mean to resist?"

"By every means in the power of a poor girl. I warn you that I will say No! to the end. You may put my hand in that man's, I will say No! You may drag me before the altar, I will say No! You may force me to kneel at the priest's feet, and to the priest's face I will say No!"

"What matters it? Ascanio will believe that you have consented to the marriage that is forced upon you."

"For that reason I hope I may not have to submit to it, madame."

"Upon whom do you rely to come to your assistance?"

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"Upon God above, and upon a man on earth."

"But the man is a prisoner."

"The man is free, madame."

"Why, who is the man, I pray to know?"

"Benvenuto Cellini."

The duchess ground her teeth when she heard the name of the man she considered her deadliest foe. But as she was on the point of repeating the name, accompanied by some terrible imprecation, a page raised the portière and announced the king.

At that announcement she darted from the room to meet François I. with a smile upon her lips, and led him to her own apartments, motioning to her people to keep watch upon Colombe.

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XI.

BENVENUTO AT BAY.

An hour after the imprisonment of Ascanio and the abduction of Colombe, Benvenuto Cellini rode along the Quai des Augustins at a footpace. He had just parted from the king and the court, whom he had amused throughout the journey by innumerable tales, told as he only could tell them, mingled with anecdotes of his own adventures. But when he was once more alone he became thoughtful and abstracted; the frivolous talker gave place to the profound dreamer. While his hand shook the rein, his brain was busily at work; he dreamed of the casting of his Jupiter, upon which depended his dear Ascanio's happiness as well as his artistic fame; the bronze was fermenting in his brain before being melted in the furnace. Outwardly he was calm.

When he reached the door of the Hôtel de Nesle he stopped for a moment, amazed not to hear the sound of hammering; the blackened walls of the château were mute and gloomy, as if no living thing were within. Twice the master rapped without obtaining a reply; at the third summons Scozzone opened the door.

"Ah, there you are, master!" she cried when she saw that it was Benvenuto. "Alas! why did you not return two hours earlier?"

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"What has happened, in God's name?" demanded Cellini.

"The provost, Comte d'Orbec, and the Duchesse d'Etampes have been here."

"Well?"

"They made a search."

"And then?"

"They found Colombe in the head of the statue of Mars."

"Impossible!"

"The Duchesse d'Etampes carried Colombe home with her, and the provost ordered Ascanio to be taken to the Châtelet."

"Ah! we have been betrayed!" cried Benvenuto striking his hand against his forehead and stamping upon the ground. As his first thought on every occasion was of vengeance, he left his horse to find his own way to the stable, and darted into the studio.

"Come hither, all of you," he cried, — "all!"

Thereupon each one had to undergo an examination in due form, but they were all equally ignorant, not only of Colombe's hiding place, but of the means by which her enemies had succeeded in discovering it. There was not a single one, including Pagolo, upon whom the master's suspicion fell first of all, who did not exculpate himself in a way that left no doubt in Benvenuto's mind. It is needless to say that he did not for an instant suspect Hermann, and Simon-le-Gaucher for no more than an instant.

When he became convinced that he could learn nothing in that direction, Benvenuto, with the rapidity of decision which was usual with him, made up his mind what course to pursue; and having made sure that his sword was at his side and that his dagger moved easily

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in its sheath, he ordered everybody to remain at home in order to be at hand in case of need. He then left the studio, and hurried across the courtyard into the street.

His features, his gait, and his every movement, bore the stamp of intense excitement. A thousand thoughts, a thousand schemes, a thousand painful reflections, were jostling one another confusedly in his head. Ascanio failed him at the moment when his presence was most essential, for all his apprentices, with the most intelligent of them all at their head, were none too many for the casting of his Jupiter. Colombe was abducted; and Colombe in the midst of her foes might lose heart. The serene, sublime confidence which served the poor child as a bulwark against evil thoughts and perverse designs would perhaps grow weaker, or abandon her altogether, in such a maze of plots and threats. With all the rest, he remembered that one day he had spoken to Ascanio of the possibility of some cruel vengeance on the part of the Duchesse d'Etampes, whereupon Ascanio replied with a smile, —

"She will not dare to ruin me, for with a word I could ruin her."

Benvenuto sought to learn the secret, but Ascanio would make no other reply to his questions than this: —

"To-day it would be treachery, master. Wait until the day comes when it will be only a legitimate means of defence."

Benvenuto understood the delicacy which closed his mouth, and waited. Now it was necessary that he should see Ascanio, and his first endeavors should be directed to that end.

With Benvenuto the wish led at once to the decision

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necessarily to gratify it. He had hardly said to himself that he must see Ascanio, before he was knocking at the door of the Châtelet. The wicket opened, and one of the provost's people asked Cellini who he was. Another man was standing behind him in the shadow.

"My name is Benvenuto Cellini," replied the goldsmith.

"What do you wish?"

"To see a prisoner who is confined herein."

"What is his name?"

"Ascanio."

"Ascanio is in secret and can see no one."

"Why is he in secret?"

"Because he is charged with a crime punishable with death."

"An additional reason why I should see him," cried Benvenuto.

"Your logic is most extraordinary, Signor Cellini," said the man who was standing in the background, in a jeering tone, "and does n't pass current at the Châtelet."

"Who laughs when I proffer a request? Who jeers when I implore a favor?" cried Benvenuto.

"I," said the voice, — "I, Robert d'Estourville, Provost of Paris. To each his turn, Signor Cellini. Every contest consists of a game and revenge. You won the first bout, and the second is mine. You illegally took my property, I legally take your apprentice. You refused to return the one to me, so never fear, I will not return the other to you. You are gallant and enterprising; you have an army of devoted retainers. Come on, my stormer of citadels! Come on, my scaler of walls! Come on, my burster in of doors! Come and take the Châtelet! I am waiting for you."

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With that the wicket was closed.

Benvenuto, with a roar, darted at the massive iron door, but could make no impression upon it with the united efforts of his feet and hands.

"Come on, my friend, come on, strike, strike!" cried the provost from the other side of the door; "you will only succeed in making a noise, and if you make too much, beware the watch, beware the archers! Ah! the Châtelet is n't like the Hôtel de Nesle, you 'll find; it belongs to our lord the king, and we shall see if you are more powerful in France than the king."

Benvenuto cast his eyes about and saw upon the quay an uprooted mile-stone which two ordinary men would have found difficulty in lifting. He walked to where it lay picked it up and put it on his shoulder as easily as a child could do the same with a pebble. He had taken but a step or two, however, when he reflected that, when the door was broken in, he should find the guard waiting for him, and the result would be that he should himself be imprisoned, — imprisoned when Ascanio's liberty was dependent upon his own. He therefore dropped the stone, which was driven some inches into the ground by its own weight.

Doubtless the provost was watching him from some invisible loophole, for he heard a burst of laughter.

Benvenuto hurried away at full speed, lest he should yield to the desire to dash his head against the accursed door.

He went directly to the Hôtel d'Etampes.

All was not lost, if, failing to see Ascanio, he could see Colombe. Perhaps Ascanio, in the overflowing of his heart, had confided to his beloved the secret he had refused to confide to his master.

All went well at first. The gateway of the mansion

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was open; he crossed the courtyard and entered the reception-room, where stood a tall footman with lace on all the seams of his livery, — a sort of colossus four feet wide and six high.

"Who are you?" he demanded, eying the goldsmith from head to foot.

At another time Benvenuto would have answered his insolent stare by one of his customary violent outbursts, but it was essential that he should see Colombe. Ascanio's welfare was at stake: so he restrained himself.

"I am Benvenuto Cellini, the Florentine goldsmith," he replied.

"What do you wish?"

"To see Mademoiselle Colombe."

"Mademoiselle Colombe is not visible."

"Why is she not visible?"

"Because her father, Messire d'Estourville, Provost of Paris, gave her in charge to Madame d'Etampes, and requested her to keep an eye upon her."

"But I am a friend."

"An additional reason for suspecting you."

"I tell you that I must see her," said Benvenuto, beginning to get warm.

"And *I* tell *you* that you shall not see her," retorted the servant.

"Is Madame d'Etampes visible?"

"No more than Mademoiselle Colombe."

"Not even to me, her jeweller?"

"Less to you than to any other person."

"Do you mean that orders have been given not to admit me?"

"Just so," replied the servant; "you have put your finger on the spot."

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"Do you know that I am a strange man, my friend," said Benvenuto, with the terrible laugh which ordinarily preceded his outbursts of wrath; "and that the place I am forbidden to enter is the place I am accustomed to enter?"

"How will you do it, eh? You amuse me."

"When there is a door, and a blackguard like you in front of it, for instance —"

"Well?" said the valet.

"Well!" retorted Benvenuto, suiting the action to the word, "I overturn the blackguard, and break in the door."

And with a blow of his fist he laid the valet sprawling on the floor, and burst in the door with a blow of his foot.

"Help!" cried the servant; "help!"

But the poor devil's cry of distress was not needed; as Benvenuto passed into the reception-room he found himself confronted by six others, evidently stationed there to receive him. He at once divined that Madame d'Etampes had been informed of his return, and had taken measures accordingly.

Under any other circumstances, armed as he was with dagger and sword, Benvenuto would have fallen upon them, and would probably have given a good account of himself, but such an act of violence in the abode of the king's mistress might have deplorable results. For the second time, contrary to his custom, common sense carried the day over wrath, and, being certain that he could at all events have audience of the king, to whose presence, as we know, he had the privilege of being admitted at any hour, he replaced his sword, already half drawn, in its scabbard, retraced his steps, pausing at every movement in his rear, like a lion in retreat,

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walked slowly across the courtyard, and bent his steps toward the Louvre.

Benvenuto once more assumed a calm demeanor, and walked with measured step, but his tranquillity was only apparent. Great drops of perspiration were rolling down his cheeks, and his wrath was rising mountain high within his breast, his superhuman efforts to master it making him suffer the more. Indeed, nothing could be more utterly antipathetic to his impulsive nature than delay, than the wretched obstacle of a closed door, or the vulgar insolence of a lackey. Strong men who command their thoughts are never so near despair as when they come in collision with some material obstacle and struggle to no purpose to surmount it. Benvenuto would have given ten years of his life to have some man jostle him, and as he walked along he raised his head from time to time and gazed threateningly at those who passed, as if he would say: —

"Is n't there some unfortunate wretch among you who is tired of life? If so, let him apply to me, I 'm his man!"

A quarter of an hour later he reached the Louvre and went at once to the apartment set apart for the pages, requesting immediate speech of his Majesty. It was his purpose to tell François the whole story, and make an appeal to his loyalty, and, if he could not obtain Ascanio's release, to solicit permission to see him. As he came through the streets he considered what language he would use to the king, and as he had some pretensions to eloquence he was well content with the little speech he had prepared. The excitement, the terrible news he had learned so suddenly, the insults heaped upon him, the obstacles he could not overcome, all these had combined to set the blood on fire in the irascible

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artist's veins: his temples throbbed, his heart beat quickly, his hands shook. He did not himself know the extent of the feverish agitation which multiplied the energy of his body and his heart. A whole day is sometimes concentrated in one minute.

In such a frame of mind was Benvenuto when he appealed to a page for admission to the king's apartments.

"The king is not visible," was the young man's reply.

"Do you not recognize me?" asked Benvenuto in surprise.

"Perfectly."

"I am Benvenuto Cellini, and his Majesty is always visible to me."

"It is precisely because you are Benvenuto Cellini," returned the page, "that you cannot enter."

Benvenuto was thunderstruck.

"Ah! is it you, M. de Termes?" continued the page, addressing a courtier who arrived just behind the goldsmith. "Pass in, pass in, Comte de la Faye; pass in, Marquis des Prés."

"And what of me! what of me, pray?" cried Benvenuto, turning white with anger.

"You? The king, when he returned ten minutes since, said, 'If that insolent Florentine makes his appearance, let him know that I do not choose to receive him, and advise him to be submissive unless he desires to make a comparison between the Castle of San Angelo and the Châtelet."

"Help me, patience! Oh help me!" muttered Benvenuto in a hollow voice: "Vrai Dieu! I am not accustomed to being made to wait by kings. The Vatican 's no less a place than the Louvre, and Leo X. is no less great a man than François I., and yet I was not kept

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waiting at the door of the Vatican, nor at that of Leo X. But I understand; it 's like this: the king was with Madame d'Etampes, — yes, the king has just come from his mistress and has been put on his guard by her against me. Yes, that 's the way it is: patience for Ascanio! patience for Colombe!"

Notwithstanding his praiseworthy resolution to be patient, however, Benvenuto was obliged to lean against a pillar for support: his heart was swollen to bursting, and his legs trembled under him. This last insult not only wounded him in his pride, but in his friendship. His soul was filled with bitterness and despair, and his clenched hands, his frown, and his tightly closed lips bore witness to the violence of his suffering.

However, in a moment or two he recovered himself, tossed back the hair which was falling over his brow, and left the palace with firm and resolute step. All who were present watched him with something very like respect as he walked away.

Benvenuto's apparent tranquillity was due to the marvellous power he possessed over himself, for he was in reality more confused and desperate than a stag at bay. He wandered through the streets for some time, heedless as to where he might be, hearing nothing but the buzzing of the blood in his ears, and vaguely wondering, as one does in intoxication, whether he was awake or asleep. It was the third time he had been shown the door within an hour. It was the third time that doors had been shut in his face, — in his face, Benvenuto's, the favorite of princes, popes, and kings, before whom all doors were thrown open to their fullest extent when his footsteps were heard approaching! And yet, notwithstanding this threefold affront, he had not the right to give way to his anger; he must dissemble, and hide

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his humiliation until he had rescued Colombe and Ascanio. The throng through which he passed, thoughtless or full of business, seemed to him to read upon his brow the story of the repeated insults he had undergone. It was perhaps the only moment in his whole life when his great heart lost faith in itself. But after ten or fifteen minutes of this aimless, blind wandering, his will reasserted itself, and he raised his head: his depression left him, and the fever returned.

"Go to!" he cried aloud, to such a degree did his mind dominate his body; "go to! in vain do they crowd the man, they cannot throw down the artist! Come, sculptor, and make them repent of their base deeds when they admire thy handiwork! Come, Jupiter, and prove that thou art still, not the king of the gods alone, but the master of mankind!"

As he spoke, Benvenuto, acting upon an impulse stronger than himself, bent his step toward the Tournelles, that former royal residence, where the old constable, Anne de Montmorency, still dwelt.

The effervescent artist was required to await his turn for an hour before he was admitted to the presence of the warrior minister of François I., who was besieged by a mob of courtiers and petitioners. At last he was introduced.

Anne de Montmorency was a man of great height, little if any bent by age, cold, stiff, and spare, with a piercing glance and an abrupt manner of speaking; he was forever scolding, and no one ever saw him in good humor. He would have looked upon it as a humiliation to be surprised with a laugh upon his face. How had this morose old man succeeded in making himself agreeable to the amiable and gracious prince, who then governed France? It is something that can be explained

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in no other way than by the law of contrasts. François I. had a way of sending away satisfied those whose petitions he refused; the constable, on the other hand, arranged matters in such a way that those whom he gratified went away in a rage. He was only moderately endowed in the way of genius, but he won the king's confidence by his military inflexibility and his dictatorial gravity.

When Benvenuto entered, Montmorency was, as usual, striding back and forth in his apartment. He nodded in response to the goldsmith's salutation; then paused in his walk, and, fixing his piercing gaze upon him, inquired, —

"Who are you?"

"Benvenuto Cellini."

"Your profession?"

"Goldsmith to the king," replied the artist, wondering to find that his first reply did not make the second question unnecessary.

"Ah! yes, yes," growled the constable. "I recognize you. Well, what do you want, what have you to ask, my friend? That I give you an order? If you have counted on that, your time is thrown away, I give you warning. Upon my word, I have no patience with this mania for art which is raging so everywhere to-day. One would say it was an epidemic that has attacked every one except myself. No, sculpture does n't interest me in the very least, Master Goldsmith, do you hear? So apply to others, and good night."

Benvenuto made a gesture, but before he could speak, the constable continued: —

"Mon Dieu! don't let that discourage you. You will find plenty of courtiers who like to ape the king, and noodles who pose as connoisseurs. As for me, hark ye!

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I stick to my trade, which is to wage war, and I tell you frankly that I much prefer a good, healthy peasant-woman, who gives me a child, that is to say, a soldier, every ten months, than a wretched sculptor, who wastes his time turning out a crowd of men of bronze who are good for nothing but to raise the price of cannon."

"Monseigneur," said Benvenuto, who had listened to this long heretical harangue with a degree of patience which amazed himself, "I am not here to speak upon artistic subjects, but upon a matter of honor."

"Ah! that 's a different matter. What do you desire of me? Tell me quickly."

"Do you remember, monseigneur, that his Majesty once said to me in your presence that, on the day when I should bring him the statue of Jupiter cast in bronze, he would grant whatever favor I might ask, and that he bade you, monseigneur, and Chancelier Poyet remind him of his promise in the event of his forgetting it?"

"I remember. What then?"

"The moment is at hand, monseigneur, when I shall implore you to provide a memory for the king. Will you do it?"

"Is that what you come here to ask me, monsieur?" cried the constable; "have you intruded upon me to beg me to do something I am bound to do?"

"Monseigneur!"

"You 're an impertinent fellow, Master Goldsmith. Understand that the Connétable Anne de Montmorency does not need to be reminded to be an honorable man. The king bade me remember for him, and that is a precaution he might well take more frequently, with all due respect; I shall do as he bade me, even though the reminder be annoying to him. Adieu, Master Cellini, and make room for others."

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With that the constable turned his back on Benvenuto, and gave the signal for another petitioner to be introduced.

Benvenuto saluted the constable, whose somewhat brutal frankness was not displeasing to him, and took his leave. Still agitated, and impelled by the same feverish excitement and the same burning thoughts, he betook himself to the abode of Chancelier Poyet, near Porte Saint-Antoine, only a short distance away.

Chancelier Poyet formed a most striking and complete contrast, moral and physical, to Anne de Montmorency, who was always crabbed and always incased in armor from head to foot. He was polished, shrewd, crafty, buried in his furs, lost, so to speak, in the ermine. Naught could be seen of him save a bald head surrounded by a grizzly fringe of hair, intelligent, restless eyes, thin lips, and a white hand. He was quite as honest perhaps as the constable, but much less outspoken.

There again Benvenuto was forced to wait for half an hour. But his friends would not have recognized him; he had accustomed himself to waiting.

"Monseigneur," he said, when he was at last ushered into the chancellor's presence, "I have come to remind you of a promise the king made me in your presence, and constituted you not only the witness thereof but the guarantor."

"I know what you refer to, Messire Benvenuto," said Poyet, "and I am ready, if you wish, to bring his Majesty's promise to his mind; but it is my duty to inform you that, from a legal standpoint, you have no claim upon him, for an undertaking indefinite in form, and left to your discretion, cannot be enforced before the courts, and never affords a cause of action; where-

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fore, if the king satisfies your demand, he will do so purely as a matter of generosity and good faith."

"That is as I understand it, monseigneur," said Benvenuto, "and I simply have to request you when the occasion arises to fulfil the duty his Majesty intrusted to you, leaving the rest to his good will."

"Very well," said Poyet, "I am at your service, my dear monsieur, to that extent."

Benvenuto thereupon took his leave of the chancellor, with his mind more at ease, but his blood was still boiling, and his hands were trembling with fever. His thoughts, excited by the annoyance and irritation and insults to which he had been subjected, burst forth at last in full freedom, after their long restraint. Space and time no longer existed for the mind which they overflowed, and as Benvenuto strode along toward his home he saw in a sort of luminous dream Del Moro's house, Stefana, the Castle of San Angelo, and Colombe's garden. At the same time, he felt that his strength became more than human, and he seemed to be living in another world.

He was still laboring under this intense exaltation of feeling when he entered the Hôtel de Nesle. All the apprentices were awaiting his return, in accordance with his commands.

"Now for the casting of the Jupiter, my children!" he cried from the doorway, and darted into the studio.

"Good morning, master," said Jacques Aubry, who had come in behind Cellini, singing joyously as his wont was. "You neither saw nor heard me, did you? For five minutes I have been following you along the quay, calling you; you walked so fast that I am quite out of breath. In God's name, what 's the matter with you all? You are as sober as judges."

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"To the casting!" continued Benvenuto, without answering Aubry, although he had seen him out of the corner of his eye, and listened to him with one ear. "To the casting! Everything depends upon that. Merciful God, shall we be successful? Ah! my friend," he continued, abruptly, addressing Aubry, — "ah, my dear Jacques, what sad news awaited me on my return, and what a cruel advantage they took of my absence!"

"What is the matter, master?" cried Aubry, really disturbed by Cellini's excitement and the dejection of the apprentices.

"Above all things, boys, throw in plenty of dry spruce. You know that I have been laying in a stock of it for six months. The matter, my good Jacques, is that Ascanio is under lock and key at the Châtelet; and that Colombe, the provost's daughter, that lovely girl whom Ascanio loves, as you know, is in the hands of the Duchesse d'Etampes, her enemy: they found her in the statue of Mars where I had hidden her. But we will rescue them. Well, well, where are you going, Hermann? the wood 's in the yard, not in the cellar."

"Ascanio arrested!" cried Aubry; "Colombe carried off!"

"Yes, yes, some villanous spy must have watched them, poor children, and surprised a secret which I had kept even from you, dear Jacques. But if I discover the knave! — To the casting, boys, to the casting! — That is n't all. The king refuses to see me, whom he called his friend. So much for the friendship of men: to be sure kings are not men, but kings. The result was that I went to the Louvre to no purpose; I could not get speech of him. Ah! but my statue shall speak for me. Prepare the mould, my friends, and let us not lose a moment. That woman

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insulting poor Colombe! that infamous provost jeering at me! that jailer torturing Ascanio! Oh, I have had some fearful visions to-day, dear Jacques! I would give ten years of my life to the man who could gain admission to the prisoner, speak to him, and learn the secret by means of which I may subdue that arrogant duchess: for Ascanio knows a secret which possesses that power, Jacques, and refused to divulge it to me, noble heart! But no matter: have no fear for thy child, Stefana; I will defend him to my latest breath, and I will save him! Yes, I will save him! Ah! where is the vile traitor who betrayed us, that I may strangle him with my own hands! Let me live but three days, Stefana, for it seems to me that the fire which consumes me is burning my life away. Oh if I should die before my Jupiter is finished! To the casting, children! to the casting!"

At Benvenuto's first words Jacques Aubry became pale as death, for he suspected that he was the cause of it all. As the master proceeded, his suspicion was changed to certainty. Thereupon some plan doubtless suggested itself to him, for he stole silently away while Cellini hurried away to the foundry, followed by his workmen, and shouting like a madman, —

"To the casting, children! to the casting!"

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XII.

OF THE DIFFICULTY WHICH AN HONEST MAN EXPERIENCES IN PROCURING HIS OWN COMMITTAL TO PRISON.

Poor Jacques Aubry was in a frame of mind bordering on despair when he left the Grand-Nesle; there could be no doubt that it was he who, involuntarily to be sure, had betrayed Ascanio's secret. But who was the man who had betrayed him? Surely not that gallant nobleman whose name he did not know: ah, no! he was a gentleman. It must have been that knave of a Henriot, unless it was Robin, or Charlot, or Guillaume. To tell the truth, poor Aubry rather lost himself in his conjectures; for the fact was that he had intrusted the secret to a dozen or more intimate friends, among whom it was no easy matter to find the culprit. But no matter! the first, the real traitor was himself, Jacques Aubry, — the infamous spy so roundly denounced by Benvenuto was himself. Instead of locking away in his heart his friend's secret which he had surprised, he had spread it broadcast in a score of places, and had brought disaster upon his brother Ascanio with his infernal tongue. Jacques tore his hair; Jacques beat himself with his fists; Jacques heaped mortal insults upon himself, and could find no invectives sufficiently bitter to qualify his conduct as it deserved.

His remorse became so keen, and threw him into such a state of exasperation with himself, that, for the first

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time in his life perhaps, Jacques Aubry indulged in reflection. After all, when his head should be bald, his chest black and blue, and his conscience torn to rags, Ascanio would be no nearer freedom. At any cost, he must repair the evil he had done, instead of wasting his time in despairing.

Honest Jacques had retained these words of Benvenuto: "I would give ten years of my life to the man who would gain admission to the prisoner, speak to him, and learn the secret by means of which I may subdue that arrogant duchess." And, as we have said, he began to reflect, contrary to his wont. The result of his reflections was that he must gain admission to the Châtelet. Once there, he would find a way to reach Ascanio.

But Benvenuto had sought in vain to gain admission as a visitor; and surely Jacques Aubry could never be so audacious as to think of attempting a thing in which the master had failed. However, although it might be impossible to effect an entrance as a visitor, it certainly should be much easier, at least so the student thought, to be admitted as a prisoner. He determined, therefore, to enter the Châtelet in that character; then, when he had seen Ascanio, and Ascanio had told him all, so that he had no further business at the Châtelet, he would take his leave, rich in the possession of the precious secret, and would go to Benvenuto, not to demand the ten years of his life that he offered, but to confess his crime, and implore forgiveness.

Delighted with the fecundity of his imagination, and proud of his unexampled devotion, he bent his steps toward the Châtelet.

"Let us see," he ruminated, as he walked with deliberate step toward the prison where all his hopes were centred, —"let us see, in order to avoid any more idiotic

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mistakes, how matters stand, — no easy task, considering that the whole business seems to me as tangled as Gervaise's skein when she gives it to me to hold, and I try to kiss her. Let's begin at the beginning. Ascanio loved Colombe, the provost's daughter: so far, so good. As the provost proposed to marry her to Comte d'Orbec, Ascanio carried her off: very good. Not knowing what to do with the sweet child when he had abducted her, he hid her in the head of the statue of Mars: best of all. Faith, it was a wonderfully ingenious hiding place, and nothing less than a beast — but let us pass over that: I shall find myself again later. Thereupon it would seem that the provost, acting upon my information, got his daughter into his clutches once more, and imprisoned Ascanio. Triple brute that I am! But here is where the skein begins to be tangled. What interest has the Duchesse d'Etampes in all this? She detests Colombe, whom everybody else loves. Why? Ah! I know. I remember certain jocose remarks of the apprentices, Ascanio's embarrassment when the duchess was mentioned, — Madame d'Etampes has her eye on Ascanio, and naturally abominates her rival. Jacques, my friend, you are a miserable wretch, but you are a clever dog all the same. Ah, yes! but now how does it happen that Ascanio has in his hands the means of ruining the duchess? Why does the king appear at intervals in the affair, with one Stefana? Why did Benvenuto constantly invoke Jupiter, rather a heathenish invocation for a Catholic? Deuce take me if I can see through all that. But it is n't absolutely necessary that I should understand. Light is to be found in Ascanio's cell; therefore the most essential thing is to get myself cast into the cell with him. I will manage the rest afterward."

As he thus communed with himself he reached his

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destination, and struck a violent blow upon the great door of the Châtelet. The wicket opened, and a harsh voice demanded to know his business: it was the jailer's.

"I wish for a cell in your prison," replied Aubry in a hollow voice.

"A cell!" exclaimed the astonished jailer.

"Yes, a cell: the blackest and deepest; even that will be better than I deserve."

"Why so?"

"Because I am a great criminal."

"What crime have you committed?"

"Ah! indeed, what crime have I committed?" Jacques asked himself, for he had not thought of preparing a crime suited to the occasion. As a fertile, lively imagination was not his most prominent characteristic, notwithstanding the compliments he had addressed to himself just before, he repeated, stupidly, —

"What crime?"

"Yes, what crime?"

"Guess," said Jacques. "This fellow ought to know more about crimes than I do," he added to himself, "so I will let him give me a list, and then make my selection."

"Have you murdered anybody?" asked the jailer.

"Great God! what do you take me for, my friend?" cried the student, whose conscience rose in revolt at the thought of being taken for a murderer.

"Have you stolen anything?" continued the jailer.

"Stolen? the idea!"

"What in Heaven's name have you done then?" cried the jailer testily. "To give yourself up as a criminal is n't all that is necessary: you must say what crime you 've committed."

"But I tell you that I 'm a villain, a vile wretch, and that I deserve the wheel or the gallows!"

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"The crime? the crime?" the jailer repeated.

"The crime? Well! I have betrayed my friend."

"That 's no crime," said the jailer. "Good night." And he closed the wicket.

"That 's not a crime, you say? that 's not a crime? What is it then, pray?"

And Jacques grasped the knocker with both hands, and knocked with all his strength.

"What 's the matter? what 's the matter?" said a different voice from within the Châtelet.

"It 's a madman, who wants to be admitted into the prison," replied the jailer.

"If he 's a madman, his place is not at the Châtelet, but at the asylum."

"At the asylum!" cried Aubry, scampering away as fast as his legs would carry him, "at the asylum! Peste! that 's not what I want. I want to get into the Châtelet, not the asylum! Besides, paupers and beggars are sent to the asylum, and not people who have twenty Paris sous in their pocket as I have. The asylum! Why, that wretched jailer claims that to betray one's friend is no crime! So it seems that, in order to have the honor of being committed to prison one must have murdered or stolen. But now I think of it, — why might I not have led some young girl astray? There 's nothing dishonorable about that. Very good, but what girl? Gervaise?"

Despite his preoccupation, the student roared with laughter.

"But, after all," he said, "though it is n't so, it might have been. Good! good! I have discovered my crime: I seduced Gervaise!"

On the instant he set off for the young working-girl's home, ran up the sixty stairs which led to her lodgings,

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and burst into the room where the lovely grisette in a coquettish *négligé* was ironing her linen.

"Ah!" exclaimed Gervaise, with a fascinating little shriek; "ah! monsieur, you frightened me!"

"Gervaise, my dear Gervaise," cried Aubry, rushing toward her with open arms: "you must save my life, my child."

"One moment, one moment," said Gervaise, using the hot flat-iron as a shield; "what do you want, master gadabout? for three days I have n't seen you."

"I have done wrong, Gervaise, I am an unfortunate wretch. But a sure proof that I love you is that I run to you in my distress. I repeat it, Gervaise, you must save my life."

"Yes. I understand, you have been getting tipsy in some wine shop, and have had a dispute with some one. The archers are after you to put you in prison, and you come to poor Gervaise to give you shelter. Go to prison, monsieur, go to prison, and leave me in peace."

"That is just what I ask and all I ask, my little Gervaise, — to go to prison. But the villains refuse to commit me."

"O mon Dieu! Jacques," said the young woman compassionately, "have you gone mad?"

"There you are! they say that I am mad, and propose to send me to the asylum, while the Châtelet is where I want to go."

"You want to go to the Châtelet? What for, Aubry? The Châtelet 's a frightful prison; they say that when one gets in there, it 's impossible to say when one will come out."

"I *must* get in there, however, I must!" cried the student. "There is no other way to save him."

"To save whom?"

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"Ascanio."

"Ascanio? what, that handsome young fellow, your Benvenuto's pupil?"

"Himself, Gervaise. He is in the Châtelet, and he's there by my fault."

"Great God!"

"So that I must join him there," said Jacques, "and save him."

"Why is he in the Châtelet?"

"Because he loved the provost's daughter, and seduced her."

"Poor boy! Why, do they imprison men for that?"

"Yes, Gervaise. Now you see it was like this: he had her in hiding. I discovered the hiding place, and, like an idiot, like an infamous villain, I told the whole story to everybody."

"Except me!" cried Gervaise. "That was just like you!"

"Did n't I tell it to you, Gervaise?"

"You did n't mention it. You 're a great babbler with others, but not with me. When you come here it 's to kiss me, to drink, or to sleep, — never to talk. Understand, monsieur, that a woman loves to talk."

"Well, what are we doing at this moment, my little Gervaise?" said Jacques. "We are talking, I should say."

"Yes, because you need me."

"It is true that you could do me a great service."

"What is it?"

"You could say that I seduced you."

"Why, of course you seduced me, you wretch."

"I!" cried Jacques in amazement. "I seduced you, Gervaise?"

"Alas! yes, that is the word: seduced, monsieur, shamelessly seduced by your fine words, by your false promises."

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"By my fine words and false promises?"

"Yes. Did n't you tell me I was the prettiest girl in the whole quarter of Saint-Germain des Prés?"

"I tell you that now."

"Did n't you say that, if I did n't love you, you should die of love?"

"Do you think I said that? It 's strange I don't remember it."

"While, on the contrary, if I did love you, you would marry me."

"Gervaise, I did n't say that. Never!"

"You did say it, monsieur."

"Never, never, never, Gervaise. My father made me take an oath like Hannibal's to Hamilcar."

"What was that?"

"He made me swear to die a bachelor, like himself."

"Oh!" cried Gervaise, summoning tears to the assistance of her words with a woman's marvellous power of weeping to order, "oh! you 're like all the rest. Promises cost nothing, and when the poor girl is seduced they forget what they promised. I will take my turn at swearing now, and swear that I will never be caught again."

"And you will do well, Gervaise," said the student.

"When one thinks," cried the grisette, "that there are laws for robbers and cut-purses, and none for the scoundrels who ruin poor girls!"

"But there are, Gervaise."

"There are?"

"Why, of course. Did n't I tell you that they sent poor Ascanio to the Châtelet for seducing Colombe."

"They did well, too," said Gervaise, to whom the loss of her honor had never presented itself so forcibly until she was fully convinced that Jacques Aubry was determined not to give her his name by way of compensation.

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"Yes. they did well, and I wish you were in the Châtelet with him!"

"Mon Dieu! that 's all I ask," cried the student; "and as I told you, my little Gervaise, I rely upon you to put me there."

"You rely upon me."

"Yes."

"Make sport of me, ingrate!"

"I 'm not making sport of you, Gervaise. I say that if you had the courage —"

"To do what?"

"Accuse me before the judge."

"Of what?"

"Of having seduced you; but you would never dare."

"What 's that? I would n't dare," cried Gervaise in an injured tone, — "I would n't dare to tell the truth!"

"Consider that you would have to make oath to it, Gervaise."

"I 'll do it."

"You will make oath that I seduced you?"

"Yes, yes, — a hundred times yes!"

"Then all goes well," said the student joyfully. "I confess I was afraid: an oath is a serious matter."

"I 'll take my oath to it this instant, and send you to the Châtelet, monsieur."

"Good!"

"And you will find your Ascanio there."

"Splendid!"

"And you will have all the time you need to do pen ance together."

"It 's all that I ask."

"Where is the lieutenant criminal?"

"At the Palais de Justice."

"I will go there at once."

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"Let us go together, Gervaise."

"Yes, together. In that way the punishment will follow at once."

"Take my arm, Gervaise."

"Come, monsieur."

They set off toward the Palais de Justice at the same gait at which they were accustomed to repair on Sundays to the Pré-aux-Clercs or the Butte Montmartre.

As they drew near the Temple of Themis, as Jacques Aubry poetically called the edifice in question, Gervaise's pace slackened perceptibly. When they reached the foot of the staircase, she had some difficulty in ascending; and finally, at the door of the lieutenant criminal's sanctum, her legs failed her altogether, and the student felt her whole weight hanging upon his arm.

"Well, Gervaise," said he, "is your courage giving out?"

"No," said Gervaise, "but a lieutenant criminal is an appalling creature."

"Pardieu! he 's a man like other men!"

"True, but one must tell him things —"

"Very well; tell them."

"But I must swear."

"Then swear."

"Jacques," said Gervaise, "are you quite sure that you seduced me?"

"Am I sure of it!" said Jacques. "Pardieu! Besides, didn't you just insist upon it yourself that I did?"

"Yes, that is true; but, strangely enough, I don't seem to see things now in just the same light that I did a short time ago."

"Come, come," said Jacques, "you are weakening already: I knew you would."

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"Jacques, my dear," cried Gervaise, "take me back to the house."

"Gervaise, Gervaise," said the student, "this is n't what you promised me."

"Jacques, I will never reproach you again, or say a word about it. I loved you because you took my fancy, that 's all."

"Alas!" said the student, "this is what I feared; but it 's too late."

"How too late?"

"You came here to accuse me, and accuse me you must."

"Never, Jacques, never: you did n't seduce me, Jacques; I was a flirt."

"Nonsense!" cried the student.

"Besides," added Gervaise, lowering her eyes, "one can be seduced but once."

"What do you mean?"

"The first time one loves."

"Hoity-toity! and you made me believe that you had never loved!"

"Jacques, take me back to the house."

"Oh indeed I won't!" said Jacques, exasperated by her refusal, and by the reason she gave for it. "No! no! no!"

And he knocked at the magistrate's door.

"What are you doing?" cried Gervaise.

"You see! I am knocking."

"Come in!" cried a nasal voice.

"I will not go in," exclaimed Gervaise, doing her utmost to release her arm from the student's. "I will not go in!"

"Come in," said the same voice a second time, a little more emphatically.

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"Jacques, I will shriek, I will call for help," said Gervaise.

"Come in, I say!" said the voice a third time, nearer at hand, and at the same moment the door opened.

'Well! what do you want?" said a tall thin man dressed in black, the mere sight of whom made Gervaise tremble from head to foot.

"Mademoiselle here," said Aubry, "has come to enter complaint against a knave who has seduced her."

With that he pushed Gervaise into the black, filthy closet, which served as an anteroom to the lieutenant criminal's office. The door closed behind her as if by a spring.

Gervaise gave a feeble shriek, half terror, half surprise, and sat down, or rather fell, upon a stool which stood against the wall.

Jacques Aubry, meanwhile, lest she should call him back, or run after him, hurried away through corridors known only to law students and advocates, until he reached the courtyard of Sainte-Chapelle; thence he tranquilly pursued his way to Pont Saint-Michel, which it was absolutely certain that Gervaise must cross.

Half an hour later she appeared.

"Well!" said he, running to meet her, "what happened?"

"Alas!" said Gervaise, "you made me tell a monstrous lie; but I hope God will forgive me for it in view of my good intention."

"I 'll take it upon myself," said Aubry. "Tell me what happened."

"Do you fancy that I know?" said Gervaise. "I was so ashamed that I hardly remember what it was all about. All I know is that the lieutenant criminal questioned me, and that I answered his questions sometimes

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yes, sometimes no: but I am not sure that I answered as I should."

"Wretched girl!" cried Aubry, "I believe it will turn out that she accused herself of seducing me."

"Oh, no! I don't think I went as far as that."

"At least they have my address, have n't they, so that they can summon me?"

"Yes," murmured Gervaise, "I gave it to them."

"It 's all right then," said Aubry, "and now let us hope that God will do the rest."

Having escorted Gervaise to her abode and comforted her as best he could for the false testimony she had been compelled to give, Jacques Aubry returned home, overflowing with faith in Providence.

In fact, whether Providence took a hand in it, or chance did it all, Jacques Aubry received the next morning a summons to appear before the lieutenant criminal that same day.

This summons fulfilled Aubry's dearest hopes, and yet a court of justice is so redoubtable a place that he felt a shiver run through his veins as he read it. But we hasten to say that the certainty of seeing Ascanio again, and the longing to save the friend upon whom he had brought disaster, soon put an end to this demonstration of weakness on our student's part.

The summons fixed the hour of noon, and it was only nine o'clock: so he called upon Gervaise, whom he found no less agitated than on the previous day.

"Well?" said she, inquiringly.

"Well!" repeated Jacques triumphantly, exhibiting the paper covered with hieroglyphics which he held in his hand. "Here it is."

"For what hour?"

"Noon. That 's all I was able to read."

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"Then you don't know what you're accused of?"

"Why, of seducing you, my little Gervaise, I presume."

"You won't forget that you yourself insisted upon my doing it?"

"Why no; I am ready to give you a certificate that you utterly refused to do it."

"Then you bear me no ill will for obeying you."

"On the contrary, I couldn't be more grateful to you."

"Whatever happens?"

"Whatever happens."

"If I did say all that, it was because I was obliged to."

"Of course."

"And if, in my confusion, I said more than I meant to say, you will forgive me?"

"Not only will I forgive you, my dear, my divine Gervaise, but I do forgive you now in advance."

"Ah!" said Gervaise, with a sigh; "ah! bad boy, with such words as those you turned my head!"

From which it is easy to see that Gervaise had really been seduced.

At a quarter before twelve Jacques Aubry remembered that his summons bade him appear at twelve. He took leave of Gervaise, and as he had a long distance to go he ran all the way. Twelve o'clock was striking as he knocked at the lieutenant criminal's door.

"Come in!" cried the same nasal voice.

He was not called upon to repeat the invitation, for Jacques Aubry, with a smile on his lips, his nose in the air, and his cap over his ear, at once stood in the tall black-coated man's presence.

"What is your name?" asked the tall man.

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"Jacques Aubry," replied the student.

"What are you?"

"Law student."

"What have you been doing?"

"Seducing girls."

"Aha! you 're the man against whom a complaint was lodged yesterday by — by — "

"By Gervaise-Perrette Popinot."

"Very good; sit down yonder and await your turn."

Jacques sat down as the man in black bade him do, and waited.

Five or six persons of varying age, sex, and feature were waiting like himself, and as they had arrived before him their turns naturally came before his. Some of them went out alone, — they were the ones, doubtless, against whom no sufficient evidence was adduced, — while others went out accompanied by an exempt, or by two of the provost's guards. Jacques Aubry envied the fortune of these latter, for they were being taken to the Châtelet, to which he was so anxious to be admitted.

At last the name of Jacques Aubry, student, was called.

Jacques Aubry instantly rose and rushed into the magistrate's office as joyously as if he were on his way to the most agreeable of entertainments.

There were two men in the lieutenant criminal's sanctum; one taller, thinner, and more forbidding than he in the antechamber, which Jacques Aubry would have deemed impossible five minutes earlier: this was the clerk. The other was short, fat, coarse, with a cheerful eye, a smiling mouth, and a jovial expression generally: this was the magistrate.

Aubry's smile and his met, and the student was quite ready to grasp his hand, so strongly conscious was he of the existence of a bond of sympathy between them.

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"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the lieutenant criminal, as he caught the student's eye.

"Faith, that is true, messire," the student rejoined.

"You seem a jolly dog," said the magistrate. "Come, master knave, take a chair and sit you down."

Jacques Aubry took a chair, sat down, threw one leg over the other and swung it in high glee.

"Ah!" exclaimed the lieutenant, rubbing his hands. "Master Clerk, let us look over the complainant's deposition."

The clerk rose, and, by virtue of his great height, reached over to the other side of the table, and selected the documents concerning Jacques Aubry from a pile of papers.

"Here it is," he said.

"Who lodges the complaint?" inquired the magistrate.

"Gervaise-Perrette Popinot," said the clerk.

"That 's it," said the student, nodding his head violently; "that 's the one."

"A minor," said the clerk; "nineteen years of age."

"Oho! a minor!" exclaimed Aubry.

"So it appears from her declaration."

"Poor Gervaise!" muttered Aubry. "She was quite right when she said that she was so confused she did n't know what answers she made; she has confessed to twenty-two. However, nineteen it is."

"And so," said the lieutenant criminal, "and so, my buck, you are charged with seducing a minor child. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" echoed Aubry, joining in the judge's hilarity.

"With aggravating circumstances," continued the clerk, mingling his yelping tones with the jovial voices of the magistrate and the student.

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"With aggravating circumstances," repeated the former.

"The devil!" exclaimed Jacques. "I should like very much to know what they were."

"As the complainant remained deaf to all the entreaties and wiles of the accused for six months —"

"For six months?" Jacques interposed. "Pardon, monsieur, I think there 's a mistake there."

"For six months, monsieur, so it is written," replied the man in black, in a tone which admitted no rejoinder.

"So be it! six months it is," said Jacques; "but in truth Gervaise was quite right when she said —"

"The said Jacques Aubry, angered by her coldness, threatened her —"

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Jacques.

"Oh! oh!" echoed the judge.

"But," the clerk read on, "the said Gervaise-Perrette Popinot held out so stubbornly and courageously that the insolent fellow begged her forgiveness in view of his sincere repentance."

"Ah! ah!" muttered Aubry.

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed the magistrate.

"Poor Gervaise!" Aubry continued, speaking to himself, with a shrug; "what was the matter with her head?"

"But," continued the clerk, "his repentance was only feigned; unfortunately, the complainant, in her innocence and purity, allowed herself to be deceived by it, and one evening, when she was imprudent enough to accept refreshments of which the accused invited her to partake, the said Jacques Aubry mixed with her water —"

"With her water?" the student interrupted.

"The complainant declared that she never drinks wine, said the clerk. — "The said Jacques Aubry mixed an intoxicating decoction with her water."

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"Look you, Master Clerk," cried Aubry; "what the deuce are you reading from?"

"The complainant's deposition."

"Impossible!"

"Is it so written?" inquired the magistrate.

"It is written."

"Go on."

"After all," said Aubry aside, "the more guilty I am, the surer I shall be of being sent to join Ascanio at the Châtelet. Intoxicating decoction it is. Go on, Master Clerk."

"You confess, do you?" queried the judge.

"I confess," said the student.

"Ah, gallows-bird!" exclaimed the judge, roaring with laughter, and rubbing his hands.

"So that," continued the clerk, "poor Gervaise, bereft of her reason, ended by confessing to her seducer that she loved him."

"Aha!" said Jacques.

"Lucky knave!" murmured the lieutenant criminal, whose little eyes shone.

"Why!" cried Aubry; "why, there is n't a word of truth in the whole of it!"

"You deny the charge?"

"Absolutely."

"Write," said the magistrate, "that the accused declares that he is not guilty of any of the charges brought against him."

"Wait a moment! wait a moment!" cried the student, who reflected that if he denied his guilt, they would not send him to prison.

"So you don't deny it altogether?" queried the judge.

"I confess that there is some little truth, not in the form, but in the substance."

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"Oh! as you have confessed to the decoction," said the judge, "you may as well admit the results."

"True," said Jacques, "as I 've confessed to the decoction, I admit the rest, Master Clerk. But, upon my word," he added in an undertone, "Gervaise was quite right in saying — "

"But that 's not all," the clerk interrupted him.

"What! that 's not all!"

"The crime of which the accused was guilty had terrible results. The unhappy Gervaise discovered that she was about to become a mother."

"Ah! that is too much!" cried Jacques.

"Do you deny the paternity?" asked the judge.

"Not only do I deny the paternity, but I deny the condition."

"Write," said the judge, "that the accused denies the paternity, and also denies the condition; an inquiry will be ordered on that point."

"One moment, one moment!" cried Aubry, realizing that if Gervaise were convicted of falsehood on a single point the whole structure would fall to the ground: "did Gervaise really say what the clerk has read?"

"She said it word for word," replied the clerk.

"Then if she said it," continued Aubry, "if she said it — why — "

"Well?" queried the lieutenant criminal.

"Why, it must be so."

"Write that the accused pleads guilty to all the charges."

The clerk wrote as directed.

"Pardieu!" said the student to himself, "if Ascanio deserves a week in the Châtelet for simply paying court to Colombe, I, who have deceived Gervaise, drugged her, and seduced her, can count upon three months' incarcera-

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tion at the very least. But, faith, I would like to be sure of my facts. However, I must congratulate Gervaise. Peste! she kept to her word, and Jeanne d'Arc was nowhere beside her."

"So you confess to all the crimes you 're accused of?" said the judge.

"I do, messire," replied Jacques unhesitatingly; "I do: all of them and more too, if you choose. I am a great sinner, Monsieur le Lieutenant Criminel, don't spare me."

"Impudent varlet!" muttered the magistrate, in the tone in which the uncle of comedy speaks to his nephew, "impudent varlet, out upon you!"

With that he let his great round head, with his bloated, purple face, fall upon his breast, and reflected magisterially.

"Whereas," he began, after meditating a few moments, raising his head, and lifting the index finger of his right hand, — "write, Master Clerk, — whereas Jacques Aubry, clerk of the Basoche, has pleaded guilty to the charge of seducing one Gervaise-Perrette Popinot by fine promises and simulated affection, we sentence said Jacques Aubry to pay a fine of twenty Paris sous, to support the child, if it is a boy, and to pay the costs."

"And the imprisonment?" cried Aubry.

"Imprisonment! what do you mean?" asked the judge.

"Why, I mean the imprisonment. For Heaven's sake, are n't you going to sentence me to prison?"

"No."

"You 're not going to order me committed to the Châtelet as Ascanio was?"

"Who 's Ascanio?"

"Ascanio is a pupil of Master Benvenuto Cellini."

"What did he do?"

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"He seduced a maid."

"Who was she?"

"Mademoiselle Colombe d'Estourville, daughter of the Provost of Paris."

"What then?"

"What then! why I say that it 's unjust, when we both committed the same crime, to make a distinction in the punishment. What! you send him to prison and fine me twenty Paris sous! In God's name, is there no justice in this world?"

"On the contrary," rejoined the magistrate, "it is because there is justice in this world, and enlightened justice too, that this is as it is."

"How so?"

"There are honors and honors, my young rascal; the honor of a noble maiden is valued at imprisonment; the honor of a grisette is worth twenty Paris sous. If you want to go to the Châtelet, you must try your arts on a duchess, and then the affair will take care of itself."

"But this is frightful! immoral! outrageous!" cried the student.

"My dear friend," said the judge, "pay your fine and begone!"

"I won't pay my fine, and I won't go."

"Then I shall call a couple of archers and commit you to prison until you do pay it."

"That 's all I ask."

The judge summoned two guards: —

"Take this scoundrel to the Grands-Carmes!"

"The Grands-Carmes!" cried Jacques; "why not the Châtelet, pray?"

"Because the Châtelet is not a debtor's prison, my friend; because the Châtelet is a royal fortress, and one must have committed some heinous crime to be sent

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there. The Châtelet! Ah! yes, my little fellow, you 'll get to the Châtelet soon enough, just wait!"

"One moment," said Aubry, "one moment."

"What is it?"

"If I am not to be sent to the Châtelet, I will pay."

"Very well; if you pay, there 's nothing more to be said. You may go, you fellows, the young man will pay."

The archers went out and Jacques Aubry took from his wallet twenty Paris sous, which he spread out in a line on the judge's desk.

"See if that is right," said the lieutenant criminal.

The clerk rose, and to execute the order bent his back like a bow, embracing in the half-circle described by his body, which seemed to possess the power of lengthening itself out indefinitely, his table and the papers which lay upon it. As he stood with his feet on the floor and his hands on the judge's desk, he reminded one of a sombre-hued rainbow.

"It is right," he said.

"Then off with you, my young rascal," said the magistrate, "and give place to others; the court has no more time to waste on you. Go."

Jacques saw that he had nothing to gain by remaining there, and withdrew in despair.

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XIII.

IN WHICH JACQUES AUBRY RISES TO EPIC PROPORTIONS.

"WELL, upon my word," said the student to himself as he left the Palais de Justice, and mechanically crossed the Pont aux Moulins, which brought him out almost opposite the Châtelet; "upon my word, I am curious to know what Gervaise will say when she learns that her honor is valued at twenty Paris sous! She will say that I have been indiscreet, and told things I should n't have told, and she 'll tear my eyes out. But what do I see yonder?"

What the student saw was a page belonging to the amiable nobleman to whom he was accustomed to confide his secrets, and whom he looked upon as one of his dearest friends. The boy was leaning up against the parapet of the bridge and amusing himself by performing sleight-of-hand tricks with pebbles.

"Pardieu!" said the student, "this happens very fortunately. My friend, whose name I don't know, and who seems to stand extremely well at court, may have influence enough to have me committed to prison: Providence sends his page to me to tell me where I can find him, as I know neither his name nor his address."

In order to avail himself of what he considered a direct interposition of Providence in his behalf, Jacques Aubry advanced toward the young page, who likewise

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recognized him, and, letting his three pebbles fall into the same hand, crossed his legs and awaited the student with that knowing look which is especially characteristic of the profession to which he had the honor to belong.

"*Bon jour*, Monsieur le Page," cried Aubry from the most distant point at which he thought the boy could hear his voice.

"*Bon jour*, Seigneur Student," was the reply; "what are you doing in this quarter?"

"Faith! if I must tell you, I was looking for something which I think I have found, now that I see you; I was seeking the address of my excellent friend, the comte — the baron — the vicomte — your master's address."

"Do you wish to see him?" asked the page.

"Instantly, if possible."

"In that case you will have your wish in a moment, for he is calling on the provost."

"At the Châtelet."

"Yes, he will come out directly."

"He 's very lucky to be admitted to the Châtelet when he wishes; but is my friend the vicomte — the comte — the baron — "

"Vicomte."

"On intimate terms with Messire Robert d'Estourville? The Vicomte de — Tell me," continued Aubry, anxious to avail himself of the opportunity to learn his friend's name at last; "the Vicomte de — "

"The Vicomte de Mar— "

"Ah!" cried the student, interrupting the page in the middle of the word, as he saw the man he sought appear at the door. "Ah! my dear viscount, there you are. I was looking for you and waiting for you."

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"*Bon jour,*" said Marmagne, evidently but little pleased at the meeting. "*Bon jour*, my dear fellow. I would be glad to talk with you, but unfortunately I am very hurried. So adieu."

"One moment, one moment," cried Jacques, clinging to his friend's arm; "deuce take me! you won't leave me like this. In the first place I have a very great favor to ask of you."

"You?"

"Yes, I; and God's law, you know, bids friends to succor one another."

"Friends?"

"To be sure; are n't you my friend? What constitutes friendship? Confidence. Now I am full of confidence in you. I tell you all my own business, and other people's too."

"Have you ever had occasion to repent of your confidence."

"Never, so far as you are concerned at least; but it's not so with everybody. There is one man in Paris that I am looking for, and with God's help I shall meet him some day."

"My dear fellow," interrupted Marmagne, who had a shrewd suspicion who the man was, "I told you that I was much hurried."

"But wait a moment, pray, when I tell you that you can do me a great service."

"Well, speak quickly."

"You stand well at court, do you not?"

"My friends say so."

"You have some influence then?"

"My enemies may discover it to their cost."

"Very good! Now my dear comte — my dear baron — my dear —"

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"Vicomte."

"Help me to get into the Châtelet."

"In what capacity?"

"As a prisoner."

"As a prisoner? That's a singular ambition, on my word."

"As you please, but it's my ambition."

"For what purpose do you wish to be committed to the Châtelet?" queried Marmagne, who suspected that this strange desire on the part of the student indicated some new secret which it might be to his advantage to know.

"To any other than you I would n't tell it, my good friend," replied Jacques; "for I have learned to my cost, or rather to poor Ascanio's, that I must learn to hold my tongue. But with you it's a different matter. You know that I have no secrets from you."

"In that case tell me quickly."

"Will you have me committed to the Châtelet if I tell you?"

"Instantly."

"Well, my friend, imagine that I was idiot enough to confide to others than yourself the fact that I had seen a lovely girl in the head of the statue of Mars."

"What then?"

"The crack-brained fools! would you believe that they spread the story so that it came to the provost's ears; and as the provost had lost his daughter some days before, he suspected that it was she who had selected that hiding place. He notified D'Orbec and the Duchesse d'Etampes: they came to the Hôtel de Nesle to make a domiciliary visit while Benvenuto Cellini was at Fontainebleau. They carried off Colombe and imprisoned Ascanio."

"Nonsense!"

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"It's as I tell you, my dear viscount. And who managed it all? A certain Vicomte de Marmagne."

"But," interposed the viscount, not at all pleased to hear his name upon the student's lips, "you don't tell me why you want to be committed to the Châtelet."

"You don't understand?"

"No."

"They arrested Ascanio."

"Yes."

"And took him to the Châtelet."

"Very good."

"But what they don't know, and what nobody knows save the Duchesse d'Etampes, Benvenuto, and myself, is that Ascanio possesses a certain letter, a certain secret, which places the duchess in his power. Now do you understand?"

"Yes I begin to see light. But do you help me, my dear friend."

"You see, viscount," continued Aubry, assuming a more and more aristocratic air, "I want to be admitted to the Châtelet, get to Ascanio's cell, take the letter or learn the secret, leave the prison again, go to Benvenuto and arrange with him some method whereby Colombe's virtue and Ascanio's love may triumph, to the confusion of the Marmagnes and D'Orbecs, the provost, the Duchesse d'Etampes, and the whole clique."

"That's a very ingenious plan," said Marmagne. "Thanks for your confidence, my dear student. You shall have no reason to regret it."

"Do you promise me your assistance?"

"To what end?"

"Why, to help me get committed to the Châtelet, as I asked you."

"Rely upon me."

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"Immediately?"

"Wait here for me."

"Where I am?"

"In this same spot."

"And you?"

"I am going to get the order for your arrest."

"Ah, my friend, my dear baron, my dear count! But you must tell me your name and address in case I may need you."

"Useless. I will return at once."

"Yes, return as soon as possible; and if you chance to meet that accursed Marmagne on the road, tell him — "

"What?"

"Tell him that I have sworn an oath that he shall die by no hand but mine."

"Adieu!" cried the viscount; "adieu, and wait here for me."

"*Au revoir!*" said Aubry. "I will expect you soon. Ah! you are a friend indeed, a man one can trust, and I would be glad to know — "

"Adieu, Seigneur Student," said the page, who had stood aloof during this conversation, and was now about to follow his master.

"Adieu, my pretty page," said Aubry; "but before you leave me do me a favor."

"What is it?"

"Who is this gallant nobleman to whom you have the honor to belong?"

"He whom you've been talking with for the last fifteen minutes?"

"The same."

"And whom you call friend?"

"Yes."

"You don't know his name?"

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"No."

"Why, he is —"

"A very well known nobleman, is he not?"

"To be sure."

"And influential?"

"Next to the king and the Duchesse d'Etampes, he 's the man."

"Ah! and his name you say is —"

"He is the Vicomte de — But he is turning back and calling me. Pardon —"

"The Vicomte de —"

"The Vicomte de Marmagne."

"Marmagne!" cried Aubry, "Vicomte de Marmagne! That young gentleman is the Vicomte de Marmagne!"

"Himself."

"Marmagne! the friend of the provost and D'Orbec and Madame d'Etampes?"

"In person."

"And the enemy of Benvenuto Cellini?"

"Just so."

"Ah!" exclaimed Aubry, to whom the whole past was revealed as by a flash of lightning. "Ah! I understand now. O Marmagne, Marmagne!"

As the student was unarmed, with a movement as swift as thought, he seized the page's short sword by the hilt, drew it from its sheath, and darted in pursuit of Marmagne, shouting, "Halt!"

At his first shout, Marmagne, decidedly ill at ease, looked around, and, seeing Aubry rushing after him sword in hand, suspected that he was discovered. To stand his ground or fly was therefore the only alternative. Marmagne was not quite courageous enough to stand his ground, nor was he quite enough of a coward to fly; he therefore adopted the intermediate course of darting into

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a house, the door of which stood open, hoping to close the door behind him. But unluckily for him it was held fast to the wall by a chain which he could not detach, so that Aubry, who was some little distance behind him, was in the little courtyard before he had time to reach the staircase.

"Ah! Marmagne! you damned viscount! you infernal spy! you filcher of secrets! it 's you, is it? At last I know you, and have my hand on you! On guard, villain! on guard!"

"Monsieur," replied Marmagne, trying to assume a lordly bearing, "do you imagine that the Vicomte de Marmagne will honor the student Jacques Aubry by crossing swords with him?"

"If the Vicomte de Marmagne will not honor Jacques Aubry by crossing swords with him, Jacques Aubry will have the honor of passing his sword through the Vicomte de Marmagne's body."

To leave no doubt in the mind of him to whom this threat was addressed, Jacques Aubry placed the point of his sword against the viscount's breast, and let him feel the touch of the cold steel through his doublet.

"Murder!" cried Marmagne. "Help! help!"

"Oh, shout as much as you choose," retorted Jacques; "you will have done shouting before any one comes. And so the best thing you can do, viscount, is to defend yourself. On guard, viscount! on guard!"

"If you will have it so," cried the viscount, "wait a bit, and you will see!"

Marmagne, as the reader will have discovered ere this, was not naturally brave; but like all noblemen of that chivalrous epoch he had received a military education; furthermore, he was reputed to have some skill in fencing. It is true that this reputation was said to result rather in

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enabling him to avoid unpleasant encounters which he might have had, than in bringing to a fortunate conclusion those which he did have. It is none the less true that, being closely pressed by Jacques, he drew his sword and stood on guard in the most approved style of the art.

But if Marmagne's skill was recognized among the noblemen at court, Jacques Aubry's address was accepted as an incontestable fact among the students at the University and the clerks of the Basoche. The result was, that the moment their swords crossed each of the combatants saw that he had to do with no despicable opponent. But Marmagne had one great advantage; the page's sword, which Aubry had taken, was six inches shorter than the viscount's; this was no great disadvantage in defensive work, but became a serious matter when he wished to assume the offensive. Furthermore, Marmagne was six inches taller than the student, and being armed with a sword as much longer he had simply to present the point at his face to keep him at a distance, while Jacques cut and thrust and feinted to no purpose. Marmagne, without retreating a step, got out of reach simply by drawing his right leg back beside the left. The consequence was that, despite Aubry's agility, the viscount's long sword grazed his chest several times, while he could succeed in cutting nothing more substantial than the air, try as hard as he would.

Aubry realized that he was lost if he continued to play the same game, but in order to give his opponent no idea of the plan he proposed to adopt, he continued to thrust and parry in the ordinary way, gaining ground imperceptibly inch by inch; when he thought he was sufficiently near he allowed himself to be caught off guard as if through awkwardness. Marmagne, seeing an opening, made a lunge, but Aubry was ready for him; he parried

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the blow, and, taking advantage of the position of his opponent's sword, two inches above his head, darted under it, leaped upon him, and thrust as he leaped, so cleverly and so vigorously that the page's short sword disappeared up to the hilt in the viscount's breast.

Marmagne uttered one of those shrill cries, which indicate a severe wound; his hand fell to his side, the blood left his cheeks, and he fell headlong to the ground.

At that moment the patrol came running up, attracted by Marmagne's shrieks, the gestures of the page, and the sight of the crowd in front of the door. As Aubry still held his bloody sword in his hand, they arrested him.

Aubry undertook at first to make some resistance; but as the leader of the patrol shouted, "Disarm the villain and take him to the Châtelet," he gave up his sword, and followed the guards to the prison to which he was so anxious to gain admission, marvelling at the merciful decrees of Providence, which accorded him at the same time the two things he most desired, — vengeance upon Marmagne, and access to Ascanio.

This time no objection was made to his reception within the walls of the royal fortress; but as it seemed that it was at the moment somewhat overburdened with guests, there was a long discussion between the jailer and the warden of the prison, as to where the new comer should be lodged. At last the two worthies seemed to agree upon the point; the jailer motioned to Aubry to follow him, led him down thirty-two steps, opened a door, pushed him into a very dark dungeon, and closed the door behind him.

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XIV.

OF THE DIFFICULTY WHICH AN HONEST MAN EXPERIENCES IN SECURING HIS RELEASE FROM PRISON.

THE student stood for an instant blinded by the abrupt transition from light to darkness. Where was he? He had no idea. Was he near Ascanio or far from him? He knew not. In the corridor through which he had passed, he had noticed but two other doors beside the one which was opened for him. But his primary object was gained; he was under the same roof as his friend.

Meanwhile, as he could not spend the rest of his life in that one spot, and as he could see at the other end of the dungeon, about fifteen feet away, a faint ray of light struggling in through an air hole, he cautiously put forth his leg, with the instinctive purpose of walking to that spot; but at the second step that he took the floor seemed suddenly to give way under his feet; he plunged down three or four stairs, and would doubtless have gone head foremost against the wall had not his feet come in contact with some object which tripped him up. The result was that he escaped with nothing worse than a few bruises.

The object which had unwittingly rendered him so important a service, uttered a hollow groan.

"I beg your pardon," said Jacques, rising and politely removing his cap. "It seems that I stepped upon some person or some thing, a rudeness of which I should never have been guilty, if I had been able to see clearly."

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"You stepped," said a voice, "upon what was for sixty years a man, but is soon to become a corpse for all eternity."

"In that case," said Jacques, "my regret is all the greater for having disturbed you at a moment when you were engaged doubtless, as every good Christian should be at such a time, in settling your accounts with God."

"My accounts are all settled, Master Student: I have sinned like a man, but I have suffered like a martyr; and I hope that God, when weighing my sins and my sorrows, will find that the sum of the latter exceeds that of the former."

"Amen!" said Aubry, "I hope so too with all my heart. But if it will not fatigue you too much, my dear companion in adversity, — I say my dear companion, because I presume you bear no malice on account of the little accident which procured me the honor of your acquaintance a short time since, — if it will not fatigue you too much, I say, pray tell me how you succeeded in ascertaining that I am a student."

"I knew it by your costume, and by the inkhorn hanging at your belt, in the place where a gentleman carries his dagger."

"You say you knew it by my costume, — by the inkhorn? Ah! my dear companion, you told me, if I mistake not, that you are at the point of death?"

"I hope that I have at last reached the end of my sufferings: yes, I hope to fall asleep to-day on earth, to wake to-morrow in heaven."

"I in no wise dispute what you say," replied Jacques, "but I will venture to remind you that your present situation is not one in which it is customary to joke."

"Who says that I am joking?" murmured the dying man with a deep sigh.

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"What! you say that you recognized me by my costume, by the inkhorn at my belt, and I, look as hard as I may, cannot see my hands before my face."

"Possibly," rejoined the prisoner, "but when you have been fifteen years in a dungeon as I have, you will be able to see in the darkness, as well as you could see formerly in broad daylight."

"May the devil tear my eyes out rather than make them serve such an apprenticeship!" cried the student. "Fifteen years! you have been fifteen years in prison?"

"Fifteen or sixteen years, perhaps more, perhaps less. I long since ceased to count days or to measure time."

"You must have committed some abominable crime," cried the student, "to have been punished so pitilessly."

"I am innocent," replied the prisoner.

"Innocent!" cried Jacques aghast. "Ah! my dear comrade, I have already reminded you that this is no time for joking."

"And I replied that I was not joking."

"But still less is it a time for lying, for a joke is simply a relaxation of the mind, which offends neither heaven nor earth, while lying is a deadly sin, which compromises the soul's wellbeing."

"I have never lied."

"Why you say that you are innocent, and yet you have been fifteen years in prison?"

"Fifteen years more or less, I said."

"Ah!" cried Jacques, "and I also am innocent!"

"May God protect you then!" rejoined the dying man.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because a guilty man may hope for pardon; an innocent man, never!"

"What you say is very profound, my friend; but it's not consoling at all, do you know?"

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"I tell you the truth."

"Come," said Jacques, "come, you have some little peccadillo or other to reproach yourself with, have n't you? Between ourselves, tell me about it."

With that Jacques, who was really beginning to distinguish objects in the darkness, took a stool, carried it to the dying man's bedside, and, selecting a spot where there was a recess in the wall, placed the stool there and made himself as comfortable as possible in his improvised armchair.

"Ah! you say nothing, my friend; you have no confidence in me. Oh, well! I can understand that: fifteen years in prison may well have made you suspicious. My name is Jacques Aubry. I am twenty-two years old, and a student, as you have discovered, — according to what you say, at least. I had certain reasons which concern myself alone, for getting myself committed to the Châtelet; I have been here ten minutes; I have had the honor of making your acquaintance. There 's my whole life in a word, and you know me now as well as I know myself. Now, my dear companion, I will listen to you."

"I am Etienne Raymond," said the prisoner.

"Etienne Raymond," the student repeated; "I don't know that name."

"In the first place," said the prisoner, "you were a child when it pleased God to have me disappear from the world: in the next place, I was of little consequence in the world, so that no one noticed my absence."

"But what did you do? Who were you?

"I was the Connétable de Bourbon's confidential servant."

"Oho! and you had a share with him in betraying the state. In that case I am no longer surprised."

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"No; I refused to betray my master, that was all."

"Tell me about it; how did it happen?"

"I was at the constable's hôtel in Paris, while he was living at his château of Bourbon-l'Archambault. One day the captain of his guards arrived with a letter from monseigneur. The letter bade me instantly hand to the messenger a small sealed package which I would find in the duke's bedroom in a small closet near the head of his bed. I went with the captain to the bedroom, opened the closet, found the package in the place described, and handed it to the messenger, who immediately took his leave. An hour later an officer with a squad of soldiers came from the Louvre, and bade me throw open the duke's bedroom and show them a small closet near the head of the bed. I obeyed: they opened the closet, but failed to find what they sought, which was nothing less than the package the duke's messenger had carried away."

"The devil! the devil!" muttered Aubry, beginning to take a deep interest in the situation of his companion in misfortune.

"The officer made some terrible threats, to which I made no other reply than that I knew nothing about what he asked me; for if I had said that I had just handed the package to the duke's messenger, they could have pursued him and taken it from him."

"Peste!" Aubry interrupted; "that was clever of you, and you acted like a faithful and trusty retainer."

"Thereupon the officer gave me in charge to two guards, and returned to the Louvre with the others. In half an hour he returned with orders to take me to the château of Pierre-Encise at Lyons. They put irons on my feet, bound my hands, and tossed me into a carriage with a soldier on either side. Five days later I was confined in a prison, which, I ought to say, was far from

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being as dark and severe as this. But what does that matter?" muttered the dying man; "a prison 's a prison, and I have ended by becoming accustomed to this, as to all the others."

"Hum!" said Jacques Aubry; "that proves you to be a philosopher."

"Three days and three nights passed," continued Etienne Raymond; "at last, during the fourth night, I was awakened by a slight noise. I opened my eyes; my door turned upon its hinges; a woman closely veiled entered with the jailer. The jailer placed a lamp upon the table, and, at a sign from my nocturnal visitor, left the cell; thereupon she drew near my bed and raised her veil. I cried aloud."

"*Hein?* who was it, pray?" Aubry asked, edging closer to the narrator.

"It was Louise of Savoy herself, the Duchesse d'Angoulême in person; it was the Regent of France, the king's mother."

"Oho!" said Aubry; "and what was she doing with a poor devil like you?"

"She was in quest of the same sealed package which I had delivered to the duke's messenger, and which contained love letters written by the imprudent princess to the man she was now persecuting."

"Well, upon my word!" muttered Jacques between his teeth, "here 's a story most devilishly like the story of the Duchesse d'Etampes and Ascanio."

"Alas! the stories of all frivolous, love-sick princesses resemble one another," replied the prisoner, whose ears seemed to be as quick as his eyes were piercing; "but woe to the poor devils who happen to be involved in them!"

"Stay a moment! stay a moment, prophet of evil!"

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cried Aubry; "what the devil 's that you 're saying? I too am involved in the story of a frivolous, love-sick princess."

"Very well; if that is so, say farewell to the light of day, say farewell to life."

"Go to the devil with your predictions of the other world! What 's all that to me? I 'm not the one she loves, but Ascanio."

"Was it I that the regent loved?" retorted the prisoner. "Was it I, whose very existence they had never heard of? No, but I was placed between a barren love and a fruitful vengeance, and when they came together I was the one to be crushed."

"By Mahomet's belly! you are not very encouraging, my good man!" cried Aubry. "But let us return to the princess, for your narrative interests me beyond measure, just because it makes me tremble."

"The packet contained letters which she wanted, as I have told you. In exchange for them she promised me honors, dignities, titles; to see those letters again she would have extorted four hundred thousand crowns anew from another Semblançay, though he should pay for his complaisance on the scaffold.

"I replied that I had n't the letters, that I knew nothing about them, that I had no idea what she meant.

"Thereupon her munificent offers were succeeded by threats; but she found it no easier to intimidate than to bribe me, for I had told the truth. I had delivered the letters to my noble master's messenger.

"She left my cell in a furious rage, and for a year I heard nothing more. At the end of a year she returned, and the same scene was repeated.

"At that time I begged, I implored her to let me go

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free. I adjured her in the name of my wife and children; but to no purpose. I must give up the letters or die in prison.

"One day I found a file in my bread.

"My noble master had remembered me; absent, exiled, a fugitive as he was, of course he could not set me free by entreaty or by force. He sent one of his servants to France, who induced the jailer to hand me the file, telling me whence it came.

"I filed through one of the bars at my window. I made myself a rope with my sheets. I descended by the rope, but when I came to the end of it I felt in vain for the ground with my feet. I dropped, with God's name upon my lips, and broke my leg in the fall; a night patrol found me unconscious.

"I was thereupon transferred to the château of Chalons-sur-Saône. I remained there about two years, at the end of which time my persecutress made her appearance again. It was still the letters that brought her thither. This time she was accompanied by the torturer, and I was put to the question. This was useless barbarity, as she obtained no information, — indeed, she could obtain none. I knew nothing save that I had delivered the letters to the duke's messenger.

"One day at the bottom of my jug of water I found a bag filled with gold; once more my noble master bethought himself of his poor servant.

"I bribed a turnkey, or rather the miserable creature pretended to be bribed. At midnight he opened the door of my cell, and I went out. I followed him through several corridors; I could already feel the air that living men breathe, and thought that I was free, when guards rushed out upon us and bound us both. My guide had pretended to yield to my entreaties in order to get posses-

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sion of the gold he had seen in my hands, and then betrayed me to earn the reward offered to informers.

"They brought me to the Châtelet, to this cell.

"Here, for the last time, Louise of Savoy appeared; she was accompanied by the executioner.

"The prospect of death could have no other effect than the promises, threats, and torture. My hands were bound; a rope was passed through a ring and placed around my neck. I made the same reply as always to her demands, adding that she would fulfil my dearest wish by putting me to death, for I was driven to despair by my life of captivity.

"It was that feeling, doubtless, which made her hold her hand. She went out and the executioner followed her.

"Since then I have never seen her. What has become of my noble master? What has become of the cruel duchess? I have no idea, for since that time, some fifteen years perhaps, I have not exchanged a single word with a single living being."

"They are both dead," said Aubry.

"Both dead! the noble-hearted duke is dead! Why, he would still be a young man, not more than fifty-two. How did he die?"

"He was killed at the siege of Rome, and probably —"

Jacques was about to add, "by one of my friends," but he refrained, thinking that that might cause a coolness between the old man and himself. Jacques, as we know, was becoming very discreet.

"Probably?" the prisoner repeated.

"By a goldsmith named Benvenuto Cellini."

"Twenty years ago I would have cursed the murderer: to-day I say from the bottom of my heart, 'May his murderer be blessed!' Did they give my noble lord a burial worthy of the man?"

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destination, and struck a violent blow upon the great door of the Châtelet. The wicket opened, and a harsh voice demanded to know his business: it was the jailer's.

"I wish for a cell in your prison," replied Aubry in a hollow voice.

"A cell!" exclaimed the astonished jailer.

"Yes, a cell: the blackest and deepest; even that will be better than I deserve."

"Why so?"

"Because I am a great criminal."

"What crime have you committed?"

"Ah! indeed, what crime have I committed?" Jacques asked himself, for he had not thought of preparing a crime suited to the occasion. As a fertile, lively imagination was not his most prominent characteristic, notwithstanding the compliments he had addressed to himself just before, he repeated, stupidly, —

"What crime?"

"Yes, what crime?"

"Guess," said Jacques. "This fellow ought to know more about crimes than I do," he added to himself, "so I will let him give me a list, and then make my selection."

"Have you murdered anybody?" asked the jailer.

"Great God! what do you take me for, my friend?" cried the student, whose conscience rose in revolt at the thought of being taken for a murderer.

"Have you stolen anything?" continued the jailer.

"Stolen? the idea!"

"What in Heaven's name have you done then?" cried the jailer testily. "To give yourself up as a criminal isn't all that is necessary: you must say what crime you've committed."

"But I tell you that I'm a villain, a vile wretch, and that I deserve the wheel or the gallows!"

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"The crime? the crime?" the jailer repeated.

"The crime? Well! I have betrayed my friend."

"That 's no crime," said the jailer. "Good night." And he closed the wicket.

"That 's not a crime, you say? that 's not a crime? What is it then, pray?"

And Jacques grasped the knocker with both hands, and knocked with all his strength.

"What 's the matter? what 's the matter?" said a different voice from within the Châtelet.

"It 's a madman, who wants to be admitted into the prison," replied the jailer.

"If he 's a madman, his place is not at the Châtelet, but at the asylum."

"At the asylum!" cried Aubry, scampering away as fast as his legs would carry him, "at the asylum! Peste! that 's not what I want. I want to get into the Châtelet, not the asylum! Besides, paupers and beggars are sent to the asylum, and not people who have twenty Paris sous in their pocket as I have. The asylum! Why, that wretched jailer claims that to betray one's friend is no crime! So it seems that, in order to have the honor of being committed to prison one must have murdered or stolen. But now I think of it, — why might I not have led some young girl astray? There 's nothing dishonorable about that. Very good, but what girl? Gervaise?"

Despite his preoccupation, the student roared with laughter.

"But, after all," he said, "though it is n't so, it might have been. Good! good! I have discovered my crime: I seduced Gervaise!"

On the instant he set off for the young working-girl's home, ran up the sixty stairs which led to her lodgings,

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and burst into the room where the lovely grisette in a coquettish *négligé* was ironing her linen.

"Ah!" exclaimed Gervaise, with a fascinating little shriek; "ah! monsieur, you frightened me!"

"Gervaise, my dear Gervaise," cried Aubry, rushing toward her with open arms: "you must save my life, my child."

"One moment, one moment," said Gervaise, using the hot flat-iron as a shield; "what do you want, master gadabout? for three days I have n't seen you."

"I have done wrong, Gervaise, I am an unfortunate wretch. But a sure proof that I love you is that I run to you in my distress. I repeat it, Gervaise, you must save my life."

"Yes. I understand, you have been getting tipsy in some wine shop, and have had a dispute with some one. The archers are after you to put you in prison, and you come to poor Gervaise to give you shelter. Go to prison, monsieur, go to prison, and leave me in peace."

"That is just what I ask and all I ask, my little Gervaise, — to go to prison. But the villains refuse to commit me."

"O mon Dieu! Jacques," said the young woman compassionately, "have you gone mad?"

"There you are! they say that I am mad, and propose to send me to the asylum, while the Châtelet is where I want to go."

"You want to go to the Châtelet? What for, Aubry? The Châtelet 's a frightful prison; they say that when one gets in there, it 's impossible to say when one will come out."

"I *must* get in there, however, I must!" cried the student. "There is no other way to save him."

"To save whom?"

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"Ascanio."

"Ascanio? what, that handsome young fellow, your Benvenuto's pupil?"

"Himself, Gervaise. He is in the Châtelet, and he 's there by my fault."

"Great God!"

"So that I must join him there," said Jacques, "and save him."

"Why is he in the Châtelet?"

"Because he loved the provost's daughter, and seduced her."

"Poor boy! Why, do they imprison men for that?"

"Yes, Gervaise. Now you see it was like this: he had her in hiding. I discovered the hiding place, and, like an idiot, like an infamous villain, I told the whole story to everybody."

"Except me!" cried Gervaise. "That was just like you!"

"Did n't I tell it to you, Gervaise?"

"You did n't mention it. You 're a great babbler with others, but not with me. When you come here it 's to kiss me, to drink, or to sleep, — never to talk. Understand, monsieur, that a woman loves to talk."

"Well, what are we doing at this moment, my little Gervaise?" said Jacques. "We are talking, I should say."

"Yes, because you need me."

"It is true that you could do me a great service."

"What is it?"

"You could say that I seduced you."

"Why, of course you seduced me, you wretch."

"I!" cried Jacques in amazement. "I seduced you, Gervaise?"

"Alas! yes, that is the word: seduced, monsieur, shamelessly seduced by your fine words, by your false promises."

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"By my fine words and false promises?"

"Yes. Did n't you tell me I was the prettiest girl in the whole quarter of Saint-Germain des Prés?"

"I tell you that now."

"Did n't you say that, if I did n't love you, you should die of love?"

"Do you think I said that? It 's strange I don't remember it."

"While, on the contrary, if I did love you, you would marry me."

"Gervaise, I did n't say that. Never!"

"You did say it, monsieur."

"Never, never, never, Gervaise. My father made me take an oath like Hannibal's to Hamilcar."

"What was that?"

"He made me swear to die a bachelor, like himself."

"Oh!" cried Gervaise, summoning tears to the assistance of her words with a woman's marvellous power of weeping to order, "oh! you 're like all the rest. Promises cost nothing, and when the poor girl is seduced they forget what they promised. I will take my turn at swearing now, and swear that I will never be caught again."

"And you will do well, Gervaise," said the student.

"When one thinks," cried the grisette, "that there are laws for robbers and cut-purses, and none for the scoundrels who ruin poor girls!"

"But there are, Gervaise."

"There are?"

"Why, of course. Did n't I tell you that they sent poor Ascanio to the Châtelet for seducing Colombe."

"They did well, too," said Gervaise, to whom the loss of her honor had never presented itself so forcibly until she was fully convinced that Jacques Aubry was determined not to give her his name by way of compensation.

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"Yes. they did well, and I wish you were in the Châtelet with him!"

"Mon Dieu! that 's all I ask," cried the student; "and as I told you, my little Gervaise, I rely upon you to put me there."

"You rely upon me."

"Yes."

"Make sport of me, ingrate!"

"I 'm not making sport of you, Gervaise. I say that if you had the courage —"

"To do what?"

"Accuse me before the judge."

"Of what?"

"Of having seduced you; but you would never dare."

"What 's that? I would n't dare," cried Gervaise in an injured tone, — "I would n't dare to tell the truth!"

"Consider that you would have to make oath to it, Gervaise."

"I 'll do it."

"You will make oath that I seduced you?"

"Yes, yes, — a hundred times yes!"

"Then all goes well," said the student joyfully. "I confess I was afraid: an oath is a serious matter."

"I 'll take my oath to it this instant, and send you to the Châtelet, monsieur."

"Good!"

"And you will find your Ascanio there."

"Splendid!"

"And you will have all the time you need to do pen ance together."

"It 's all that I ask."

"Where is the lieutenant criminal?"

"At the Palais de Justice."

"I will go there at once."

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"Let us go together, Gervaise."

"Yes, together. In that way the punishment will follow at once."

"Take my arm, Gervaise."

"Come, monsieur."

They set off toward the Palais de Justice at the same gait at which they were accustomed to repair on Sundays to the Pré-aux-Clercs or the Butte Montmartre.

As they drew near the Temple of Themis, as Jacques Aubry poetically called the edifice in question, Gervaise's pace slackened perceptibly. When they reached the foot of the staircase, she had some difficulty in ascending; and finally, at the door of the lieutenant criminal's sanctum, her legs failed her altogether, and the student felt her whole weight hanging upon his arm.

"Well, Gervaise," said he, "is your courage giving out?"

"No," said Gervaise, "but a lieutenant criminal is an appalling creature."

"Pardieu! he 's a man like other men!"

"True, but one must tell him things —"

"Very well; tell them."

"But I must swear."

"Then swear."

"Jacques," said Gervaise, "are you quite sure that you seduced me?"

"Am I sure of it!" said Jacques. "Pardieu! Besides, didn't you just insist upon it yourself that I did?"

"Yes, that is true; but, strangely enough, I don't seem to see things now in just the same light that I did a short time ago."

"Come, come," said Jacques, "you are weakening already: I knew you would."

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"Jacques, my dear," cried Gervaise, "take me back to the house."

"Gervaise, Gervaise," said the student, "this is n't what you promised me."

"Jacques, I will never reproach you again, or say a word about it. I loved you because you took my fancy, that 's all."

"Alas!" said the student, "this is what I feared; but it 's too late."

"How too late?"

"You came here to accuse me, and accuse me you must."

"Never, Jacques, never: you did n't seduce me, Jacques; I was a flirt."

"Nonsense!" cried the student.

"Besides," added Gervaise, lowering her eyes, "one can be seduced but once."

"What do you mean?"

"The first time one loves."

"Hoity-toity! and you made me believe that you had never loved!"

"Jacques, take me back to the house."

"Oh indeed I won't!" said Jacques, exasperated by her refusal, and by the reason she gave for it. "No! no! no!"

And he knocked at the magistrate's door.

"What are you doing?" cried Gervaise.

"You see! I am knocking."

"Come in!" cried a nasal voice.

"I will not go in," exclaimed Gervaise, doing her utmost to release her arm from the student's. "I will not go in!"

"Come in," said the same voice a second time, a little more emphatically.

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"Jacques, I will shriek, I will call for help," said Gervaise.

"Come in, I say!" said the voice a third time, nearer at hand, and at the same moment the door opened.

'Well! what do you want?" said a tall thin man dressed in black, the mere sight of whom made Gervaise tremble from head to foot.

"Mademoiselle here," said Aubry, "has come to enter complaint against a knave who has seduced her."

With that he pushed Gervaise into the black, filthy closet, which served as an anteroom to the lieutenant criminal's office. The door closed behind her as if by a spring.

Gervaise gave a feeble shriek, half terror, half surprise, and sat down, or rather fell, upon a stool which stood against the wall.

Jacques Aubry, meanwhile, lest she should call him back, or run after him, hurried away through corridors known only to law students and advocates, until he reached the courtyard of Sainte-Chapelle; thence he tranquilly pursued his way to Pont Saint-Michel, which it was absolutely certain that Gervaise must cross.

Half an hour later she appeared.

"Well!" said he, running to meet her, "what happened?"

"Alas!" said Gervaise, "you made me tell a monstrous lie; but I hope God will forgive me for it in view of my good intention."

"I 'll take it upon myself," said Aubry. "Tell me what happened."

"Do you fancy that I know?" said Gervaise. "I was so ashamed that I hardly remember what it was all about. All I know is that the lieutenant criminal questioned me, and that I answered his questions sometimes

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yes, sometimes no: but I am not sure that I answered as I should."

"Wretched girl!" cried Aubry, "I believe it will turn out that she accused herself of seducing me."

"Oh, no! I don't think I went as far as that."

"At least they have my address, have n't they, so that they can summon me?"

"Yes," murmured Gervaise, "I gave it to them."

"It 's all right then," said Aubry, "and now let us hope that God will do the rest."

Having escorted Gervaise to her abode and comforted her as best he could for the false testimony she had been compelled to give, Jacques Aubry returned home, overflowing with faith in Providence.

In fact, whether Providence took a hand in it, or chance did it all, Jacques Aubry received the next morning a summons to appear before the lieutenant criminal that same day.

This summons fulfilled Aubry's dearest hopes, and yet a court of justice is so redoubtable a place that he felt a shiver run through his veins as he read it. But we hasten to say that the certainty of seeing Ascanio again, and the longing to save the friend upon whom he had brought disaster, soon put an end to this demonstration of weakness on our student's part.

The summons fixed the hour of noon, and it was only nine o'clock: so he called upon Gervaise, whom he found no less agitated than on the previous day.

"Well?" said she, inquiringly.

"Well!" repeated Jacques triumphantly, exhibiting the paper covered with hieroglyphics which he held in his hand. "Here it is."

"For what hour?"

"Noon. That 's all I was able to read."

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"Then you don't know what you 're accused of?"

"Why, of seducing you, my little Gervaise, I presume."

"You won't forget that you yourself insisted upon my doing it?"

"Why no; I am ready to give you a certificate that you utterly refused to do it."

"Then you bear me no ill will for obeying you."

"On the contrary, I could n't be more grateful to you."

"Whatever happens?"

"Whatever happens."

"If I did say all that, it was because I was obliged to."

"Of course."

"And if, in my confusion, I said more than I meant to say, you will forgive me?"

"Not only will I forgive you, my dear, my divine Gervaise, but I do forgive you now in advance."

"Ah!" said Gervaise, with a sigh; "ah! bad boy, with such words as those you turned my head!"

From which it is easy to see that Gervaise had really been seduced.

At a quarter before twelve Jacques Aubry remembered that his summons bade him appear at twelve. He took leave of Gervaise, and as he had a long distance to go he ran all the way. Twelve o'clock was striking as he knocked at the lieutenant criminal's door.

"Come in!" cried the same nasal voice.

He was not called upon to repeat the invitation, for Jacques Aubry, with a smile on his lips, his nose in the air, and his cap over his ear, at once stood in the tall black-coated man's presence.

"What is your name?" asked the tall man.

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"Jacques Aubry," replied the student.

"What are you?"

"Law student."

"What have you been doing?"

"Seducing girls."

"Aha! you 're the man against whom a complaint was lodged yesterday by — by —"

"By Gervaise-Perrette Popinot."

"Very good; sit down yonder and await your turn."

Jacques sat down as the man in black bade him do, and waited.

Five or six persons of varying age, sex, and feature were waiting like himself, and as they had arrived before him their turns naturally came before his. Some of them went out alone, — they were the ones, doubtless, against whom no sufficient evidence was adduced, — while others went out accompanied by an exempt, or by two of the provost's guards. Jacques Aubry envied the fortune of these latter, for they were being taken to the Châtelet, to which he was so anxious to be admitted.

At last the name of Jacques Aubry, student, was called.

Jacques Aubry instantly rose and rushed into the magistrate's office as joyously as if he were on his way to the most agreeable of entertainments.

There were two men in the lieutenant criminal's sanctum; one taller, thinner, and more forbidding than he in the antechamber, which Jacques Aubry would have deemed impossible five minutes earlier: this was the clerk. The other was short, fat, coarse, with a cheerful eye, a smiling mouth, and a jovial expression generally: this was the magistrate.

Aubry's smile and his met, and the student was quite ready to grasp his hand, so strongly conscious was he of the existence of a bond of sympathy between them.

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"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the lieutenant criminal, as he caught the student's eye.

"Faith, that is true, messire," the student rejoined.

"You seem a jolly dog," said the magistrate. "Come, master knave, take a chair and sit you down."

Jacques Aubry took a chair, sat down, threw one leg over the other and swung it in high glee.

"Ah!" exclaimed the lieutenant, rubbing his hands. "Master Clerk, let us look over the complainant's deposition."

The clerk rose, and, by virtue of his great height, reached over to the other side of the table, and selected the documents concerning Jacques Aubry from a pile of papers.

"Here it is," he said.

"Who lodges the complaint?" inquired the magistrate.

"Gervaise-Perrette Popinot," said the clerk.

"That 's it," said the student, nodding his head violently; "that 's the one."

"A minor," said the clerk; "nineteen years of age."

"Oho! a minor!" exclaimed Aubry.

"So it appears from her declaration."

"Poor Gervaise!" muttered Aubry. "She was quite right when she said that she was so confused she did n't know what answers she made; she has confessed to twenty-two. However, nineteen it is."

"And so," said the lieutenant criminal, "and so, my buck, you are charged with seducing a minor child. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" echoed Aubry, joining in the judge's hilarity.

"With aggravating circumstances," continued the clerk, mingling his yelping tones with the jovial voices of the magistrate and the student.

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"With aggravating circumstances," repeated the former.

"The devil!" exclaimed Jacques. "I should like very much to know what they were."

"As the complainant remained deaf to all the entreaties and wiles of the accused for six months —"

"For six months?" Jacques interposed. "Pardon, monsieur, I think there 's a mistake there."

"For six months, monsieur, so it is written," replied the man in black, in a tone which admitted no rejoinder.

"So be it! six months it is," said Jacques; "but in truth Gervaise was quite right when she said —"

"The said Jacques Aubry, angered by her coldness, threatened her —"

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Jacques.

"Oh! oh!" echoed the judge.

"But," the clerk read on, "the said Gervaise-Perrette Popinot held out so stubbornly and courageously that the insolent fellow begged her forgiveness in view of his sincere repentance."

"Ah! ah!" muttered Aubry.

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed the magistrate.

"Poor Gervaise!" Aubry continued, speaking to himself, with a shrug; "what was the matter with her head?"

"But," continued the clerk, "his repentance was only feigned; unfortunately, the complainant, in her innocence and purity, allowed herself to be deceived by it, and one evening, when she was imprudent enough to accept refreshments of which the accused invited her to partake, the said Jacques Aubry mixed with her water —"

"With her water?" the student interrupted.

"The complainant declared that she never drinks wine," said the clerk. — "The said Jacques Aubry mixed an intoxicating decoction with her water."

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"Look you, Master Clerk," cried Aubry; "what the deuce are you reading from?"

"The complainant's deposition."

"Impossible!"

"Is it so written?" inquired the magistrate.

"It is written."

"Go on."

"After all," said Aubry aside, "the more guilty I am, the surer I shall be of being sent to join Ascanio at the Châtelet. Intoxicating decoction it is. Go on, Master Clerk."

"You confess, do you?" queried the judge.

"I confess," said the student.

"Ah, gallows-bird!" exclaimed the judge, roaring with laughter, and rubbing his hands.

"So that," continued the clerk, "poor Gervaise, bereft of her reason, ended by confessing to her seducer that she loved him."

"Aha!" said Jacques.

"Lucky knave!" murmured the lieutenant criminal, whose little eyes shone.

"Why!" cried Aubry; "why, there is n't a word of truth in the whole of it!"

"You deny the charge?"

"Absolutely."

"Write," said the magistrate, "that the accused declares that he is not guilty of any of the charges brought against him."

"Wait a moment! wait a moment!" cried the student, who reflected that if he denied his guilt, they would not send him to prison.

"So you don't deny it altogether?" queried the judge.

"I confess that there is some little truth, not in the form, but in the substance."

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"Oh! as you have confessed to the decoction," said the judge, "you may as well admit the results."

"True," said Jacques, "as I 've confessed to the decoction, I admit the rest, Master Clerk. But, upon my word," he added in an undertone, "Gervaise was quite right in saying — "

"But that 's not all," the clerk interrupted him.

"What! that 's not all! "

"The crime of which the accused was guilty had terrible results. The unhappy Gervaise discovered that she was about to become a mother."

"Ah! that is too much! " cried Jacques.

"Do you deny the paternity? " asked the judge.

"Not only do I deny the paternity, but I deny the condition."

"Write," said the judge, "that the accused denies the paternity, and also denies the condition; an inquiry will be ordered on that point."

"One moment, one moment! " cried Aubry, realizing that if Gervaise were convicted of falsehood on a single point the whole structure would fall to the ground: "did Gervaise really say what the clerk has read? "

"She said it word for word," replied the clerk.

"Then if she said it," continued Aubry, "if she said it — why — "

"Well? " queried the lieutenant criminal.

"Why, it must be so."

"Write that the accused pleads guilty to all the charges."

The clerk wrote as directed.

"Pardieu! " said the student to himself, "if Ascanio deserves a week in the Châtelet for simply paying court to Colombe, I, who have deceived Gervaise, drugged her, and seduced her, can count upon three months' incarcera-

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tion at the very least. But, faith, I would like to be sure of my facts. However, I must congratulate Gervaise. Peste! she kept to her word, and Jeanne d'Arc was nowhere beside her."

"So you confess to all the crimes you 're accused of?" said the judge.

"I do, messire," replied Jacques unhesitatingly; "I do: all of them and more too, if you choose. I am a great sinner, Monsieur le Lieutenant Criminel, don't spare me."

"Impudent varlet!" muttered the magistrate, in the tone in which the uncle of comedy speaks to his nephew, "impudent varlet, out upon you!"

With that he let his great round head, with his bloated, purple face, fall upon his breast, and reflected magisterially.

"Whereas," he began, after meditating a few moments, raising his head, and lifting the index finger of his right hand,—"write, Master Clerk,—whereas Jacques Aubry, clerk of the Basoche, has pleaded guilty to the charge of seducing one Gervaise-Perrette Popinot by fine promises and simulated affection, we sentence said Jacques Aubry to pay a fine of twenty Paris sous, to support the child, if it is a boy, and to pay the costs."

"And the imprisonment?" cried Aubry.

"Imprisonment! what do you mean?" asked the judge.

"Why, I mean the imprisonment. For Heaven's sake, are n't you going to sentence me to prison?"

"No."

"You 're not going to order me committed to the Châtelet as Ascanio was?"

"Who 's Ascanio?"

"Ascanio is a pupil of Master Benvenuto Cellini."

"What did he do?"

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"He seduced a maid."

"Who was she?"

"Mademoiselle Colombe d'Estourville, daughter of the Provost of Paris."

"What then?"

"What then! why I say that it 's unjust, when we both committed the same crime, to make a distinction in the punishment. What! you send him to prison and fine me twenty Paris sous! In God's name, is there no justice in this world?"

"On the contrary," rejoined the magistrate, "it is because there is justice in this world, and enlightened justice too, that this is as it is."

"How so?"

"There are honors and honors, my young rascal; the honor of a noble maiden is valued at imprisonment; the honor of a grisette is worth twenty Paris sous. If you want to go to the Châtelet, you must try your arts on a duchess, and then the affair will take care of itself."

"But this is frightful! immoral! outrageous!" cried the student.

"My dear friend," said the judge, "pay your fine and begone!"

"I won't pay my fine, and I won't go."

"Then I shall call a couple of archers and commit you to prison until you do pay it."

"That 's all I ask."

The judge summoned two guards: —

"Take this scoundrel to the Grands-Carmes!"

"The Grands-Carmes!" cried Jacques; "why not the Châtelet, pray?"

"Because the Châtelet is not a debtor's prison, my friend; because the Châtelet is a royal fortress, and one must have committed some heinous crime to be sent

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there. The Châtelet! Ah! yes, my little fellow, you 'll get to the Châtelet soon enough, just wait!"

"One moment," said Aubry, "one moment."

"What is it?"

"If I am not to be sent to the Châtelet, I will pay."

"Very well; if you pay, there 's nothing more to be said. You may go, you fellows, the young man will pay."

The archers went out and Jacques Aubry took from his wallet twenty Paris sous, which he spread out in a line on the judge's desk.

"See if that is right," said the lieutenant criminal.

The clerk rose, and to execute the order bent his back like a bow, embracing in the half-circle described by his body, which seemed to possess the power of lengthening itself out indefinitely, his table and the papers which lay upon it. As he stood with his feet on the floor and his hands on the judge's desk, he reminded one of a sombre-hued rainbow.

"It is right," he said.

"Then off with you, my young rascal," said the magistrate, "and give place to others; the court has no more time to waste on you. Go."

Jacques saw that he had nothing to gain by remaining there, and withdrew in despair.

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XIII.

IN WHICH JACQUES AUBRY RISES TO EPIC PROPORTIONS.

"WELL, upon my word," said the student to himself as he left the Palais de Justice, and mechanically crossed the Pont aux Moulins, which brought him out almost opposite the Châtelet; "upon my word, I am curious to know what Gervaise will say when she learns that her honor is valued at twenty Paris sous! She will say that I have been indiscreet, and told things I should n't have told, and she 'll tear my eyes out. But what do I see yonder?"

What the student saw was a page belonging to the amiable nobleman to whom he was accustomed to confide his secrets, and whom he looked upon as one of his dearest friends. The boy was leaning up against the parapet of the bridge and amusing himself by performing sleight-of-hand tricks with pebbles.

"Pardieu!" said the student, "this happens very fortunately. My friend, whose name I don't know, and who seems to stand extremely well at court, may have influence enough to have me committed to prison: Providence sends his page to me to tell me where I can find him, as I know neither his name nor his address."

In order to avail himself of what he considered a direct interposition of Providence in his behalf, Jacques Aubry advanced toward the young page, who likewise

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recognized him, and, letting his three pebbles fall into the same hand, crossed his legs and awaited the student with that knowing look which is especially characteristic of the profession to which he had the honor to belong.

"*Bon jour*, Monsieur le Page," cried Aubry from the most distant point at which he thought the boy could hear his voice.

"*Bon jour*, Seigneur Student," was the reply; "what are you doing in this quarter?"

"Faith! if I must tell you, I was looking for something which I think I have found, now that I see you; I was seeking the address of my excellent friend, the comte — the baron — the vicomte — your master's address."

"Do you wish to see him?" asked the page.

"Instantly, if possible."

"In that case you will have your wish in a moment, for he is calling on the provost."

"At the Châtelet."

"Yes, he will come out directly."

"He 's very lucky to be admitted to the Châtelet when he wishes; but is my friend the vicomte — the comte — the baron — "

"Vicomte."

"On intimate terms with Messire Robert d'Estourville? The Vicomte de — Tell me," continued Aubry, anxious to avail himself of the opportunity to learn his friend's name at last; "the Vicomte de — "

"The Vicomte de Mar— "

"Ah!" cried the student, interrupting the page in the middle of the word, as he saw the man he sought appear at the door. "Ah! my dear viscount, there you are. I was looking for you and waiting for you."

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"*Bon jour,*" said Marmagne, evidently but little pleased at the meeting. "*Bon jour,* my dear fellow. I would be glad to talk with you, but unfortunately I am very hurried. So adieu."

"One moment, one moment," cried Jacques, clinging to his friend's arm; "deuce take me! you won't leave me like this. In the first place I have a very great favor to ask of you."

"You?"

"Yes, I; and God's law, you know, bids friends to succor one another."

"Friends?"

"To be sure; are n't you my friend? What constitutes friendship? Confidence. Now I am full of confidence in you. I tell you all my own business, and other people's too."

"Have you ever had occasion to repent of your confidence."

"Never, so far as you are concerned at least; but it's not so with everybody. There is one man in Paris that I am looking for, and with God's help I shall meet him some day."

"My dear fellow," interrupted Marmagne, who had a shrewd suspicion who the man was, "I told you that I was much hurried."

"But wait a moment, pray, when I tell you that you can do me a great service."

"Well, speak quickly."

"You stand well at court, do you not?"

"My friends say so."

"You have some influence then?"

"My enemies may discover it to their cost."

"Very good! Now my dear comte — my dear baron — my dear —"

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"Vicomte."

"Help me to get into the Châtelet."

"In what capacity?"

"As a prisoner."

"As a prisoner? That 's a singular ambition, on my word."

"As you please, but it 's my ambition."

"For what purpose do you wish to be committed to the Châtelet?" queried Marmagne, who suspected that this strange desire on the part of the student indicated some new secret which it might be to his advantage to know.

"To any other than you I would n't tell it, my good friend," replied Jacques; "for I have learned to my cost, or rather to poor Ascanio's, that I must learn to hold my tongue. But with you it 's a different matter. You know that I have no secrets from you."

"In that case tell me quickly."

"Will you have me committed to the Châtelet if I tell you?"

"Instantly."

"Well, my friend, imagine that I was idiot enough to confide to others than yourself the fact that I had seen a lovely girl in the head of the statue of Mars."

"What then?"

"The crack-brained fools! would you believe that they spread the story so that it came to the provost's ears; and as the provost had lost his daughter some days before, he suspected that it was she who had selected that hiding place. He notified D'Orbec and the Duchesse d'Etampes: they came to the Hôtel de Nesle to make a domiciliary visit while Benvenuto Cellini was at Fontainebleau. They carried off Colombe and imprisoned Ascanio."

"Nonsense!"

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"It 's as I tell you, my dear viscount. And who managed it all? A certain Vicomte de Marmagne."

"But," interposed the viscount, not at all pleased to hear his name upon the student's lips, "you don't tell me why you want to be committed to the Châtelet."

"You don't understand?"

"No."

"They arrested Ascanio."

"Yes."

"And took him to the Châtelet."

"Very good."

"But what they don't know, and what nobody knows save the Duchesse d'Etampes, Benvenuto, and myself, is that Ascanio possesses a certain letter, a certain secret, which places the duchess in his power. Now do you understand?"

"Yes I begin to see light. But do you help me, my dear friend."

"You see, viscount," continued Aubry, assuming a more and more aristocratic air, "I want to be admitted to the Châtelet, get to Ascanio's cell, take the letter or learn the secret, leave the prison again, go to Benvenuto and arrange with him some method whereby Colombe's virtue and Ascanio's love may triumph, to the confusion of the Marmagnes and D'Orbecs, the provost, the Duchesse d'Etampes, and the whole clique."

"That 's a very ingenious plan," said Marmagne. "Thanks for your confidence, my dear student. You shall have no reason to regret it."

"Do you promise me your assistance?"

"To what end?"

"Why, to help me get committed to the Châtelet, as I asked you."

"Rely upon me."

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"Immediately?"

"Wait here for me."

"Where I am?"

"In this same spot."

"And you?"

"I am going to get the order for your arrest."

"Ah, my friend, my dear baron, my dear count! But you must tell me your name and address in case I may need you."

"Useless. I will return at once."

"Yes, return as soon as possible; and if you chance to meet that accursed Marmagne on the road, tell him — "

"What?"

"Tell him that I have sworn an oath that he shall die by no hand but mine."

"Adieu!" cried the viscount; "adieu, and wait here for me."

"*Au revoir!*" said Aubry. "I will expect you soon. Ah! you are a friend indeed, a man one can trust, and I would be glad to know — "

"Adieu, Seigneur Student," said the page, who had stood aloof during this conversation, and was now about to follow his master.

"Adieu, my pretty page," said Aubry; "but before you leave me do me a favor."

"What is it?"

"Who is this gallant nobleman to whom you have the honor to belong?"

"He whom you 've been talking with for the last fifteen minutes?"

"The same."

"And whom you call friend?"

"Yes."

"You don't know his name?"

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"No."

"Why, he is — "

"A very well known nobleman, is he not?"

"To be sure."

"And influential?"

"Next to the king and the Duchesse d'Etampes, he 's the man."

"Ah! and his name you say is — "

"He is the Vicomte de — But he is turning back and calling me. Pardon — "

"The Vicomte de — "

"The Vicomte de Marmagne."

"Marmagne!" cried Aubry, "Vicomte de Marmagne! That young gentleman is the Vicomte de Marmagne!"

"Himself."

"Marmagne! the friend of the provost and D'Orbec and Madame d'Etampes?"

"In person."

"And the enemy of Benvenuto Cellini?"

"Just so."

"Ah!" exclaimed Aubry, to whom the whole past was revealed as by a flash of lightning. "Ah! I understand now. O Marmagne, Marmagne!"

As the student was unarmed, with a movement as swift as thought, he seized the page's short sword by the hilt, drew it from its sheath, and darted in pursuit of Marmagne, shouting, "Halt!"

At his first shout, Marmagne, decidedly ill at ease, looked around, and, seeing Aubry rushing after him sword in hand, suspected that he was discovered. To stand his ground or fly was therefore the only alternative. Marmagne was not quite courageous enough to stand his ground, nor was he quite enough of a coward to fly; he therefore adopted the intermediate course of darting into

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a house, the door of which stood open, hoping to close the door behind him. But unluckily for him it was held fast to the wall by a chain which he could not detach, so that Aubry, who was some little distance behind him, was in the little courtyard before he had time to reach the staircase.

"Ah! Marmagne! you damned viscount! you infernal spy! you filcher of secrets! it 's you, is it? At last I know you, and have my hand on you! On guard, villain! on guard!"

"Monsieur," replied Marmagne, trying to assume a lordly bearing, "do you imagine that the Vicomte de Marmagne will honor the student Jacques Aubry by crossing swords with him?"

"If the Vicomte de Marmagne will not honor Jacques Aubry by crossing swords with him, Jacques Aubry will have the honor of passing his sword through the Vicomte de Marmagne's body."

To leave no doubt in the mind of him to whom this threat was addressed, Jacques Aubry placed the point of his sword against the viscount's breast, and let him feel the touch of the cold steel through his doublet.

"Murder!" cried Marmagne. "Help! help!"

"Oh, shout as much as you choose," retorted Jacques; "you will have done shouting before any one comes. And so the best thing you can do, viscount, is to defend yourself. On guard, viscount! on guard!"

"If you will have it so," cried the viscount, "wait a bit, and you will see!"

Marmagne, as the reader will have discovered ere this, was not naturally brave; but like all noblemen of that chivalrous epoch he had received a military education; furthermore, he was reputed to have some skill in fencing. It is true that this reputation was said to result rather in

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enabling him to avoid unpleasant encounters which he might have had, than in bringing to a fortunate conclusion those which he did have. It is none the less true that, being closely pressed by Jacques, he drew his sword and stood on guard in the most approved style of the art.

But if Marmagne's skill was recognized among the noblemen at court, Jacques Aubry's address was accepted as an incontestable fact among the students at the University and the clerks of the Basoche. The result was, that the moment their swords crossed each of the combatants saw that he had to do with no despicable opponent. But Marmagne had one great advantage; the page's sword, which Aubry had taken, was six inches shorter than the viscount's; this was no great disadvantage in defensive work, but became a serious matter when he wished to assume the offensive. Furthermore, Marmagne was six inches taller than the student, and being armed with a sword as much longer he had simply to present the point at his face to keep him at a distance, while Jacques cut and thrust and feinted to no purpose. Marmagne, without retreating a step, got out of reach simply by drawing his right leg back beside the left. The consequence was that, despite Aubry's agility, the viscount's long sword grazed his chest several times, while he could succeed in cutting nothing more substantial than the air, try as hard as he would.

Aubry realized that he was lost if he continued to play the same game, but in order to give his opponent no idea of the plan he proposed to adopt, he continued to thrust and parry in the ordinary way, gaining ground imperceptibly inch by inch; when he thought he was sufficiently near he allowed himself to be caught off guard as if through awkwardness. Marmagne, seeing an opening, made a lunge, but Aubry was ready for him; he parried

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the blow, and, taking advantage of the position of his opponent's sword, two inches above his head, darted under it, leaped upon him, and thrust as he leaped, so cleverly and so vigorously that the page's short sword disappeared up to the hilt in the viscount's breast.

Marmagne uttered one of those shrill cries, which indicate a severe wound; his hand fell to his side, the blood left his cheeks, and he fell headlong to the ground.

At that moment the patrol came running up, attracted by Marmagne's shrieks, the gestures of the page, and the sight of the crowd in front of the door. As Aubry still held his bloody sword in his hand, they arrested him.

Aubry undertook at first to make some resistance; but as the leader of the patrol shouted, "Disarm the villain and take him to the Châtelet," he gave up his sword, and followed the guards to the prison to which he was so anxious to gain admission, marvelling at the merciful decrees of Providence, which accorded him at the same time the two things he most desired, — vengeance upon Marmagne, and access to Ascanio.

This time no objection was made to his reception within the walls of the royal fortress; but as it seemed that it was at the moment somewhat overburdened with guests, there was a long discussion between the jailer and the warden of the prison, as to where the new comer should be lodged. At last the two worthies seemed to agree upon the point; the jailer motioned to Aubry to follow him, led him down thirty-two steps, opened a door, pushed him into a very dark dungeon, and closed the door behind him.

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XIV.

OF THE DIFFICULTY WHICH AN HONEST MAN EXPERIENCES IN SECURING HIS RELEASE FROM PRISON.

THE student stood for an instant blinded by the abrupt transition from light to darkness. Where was he? He had no idea. Was he near Ascanio or far from him? He knew not. In the corridor through which he had passed, he had noticed but two other doors beside the one which was opened for him. But his primary object was gained; he was under the same roof as his friend.

Meanwhile, as he could not spend the rest of his life in that one spot, and as he could see at the other end of the dungeon, about fifteen feet away, a faint ray of light struggling in through an air hole, he cautiously put forth his leg, with the instinctive purpose of walking to that spot; but at the second step that he took the floor seemed suddenly to give way under his feet; he plunged down three or four stairs, and would doubtless have gone head foremost against the wall had not his feet come in contact with some object which tripped him up. The result was that he escaped with nothing worse than a few bruises.

The object which had unwittingly rendered him so important a service, uttered a hollow groan.

"I beg your pardon," said Jacques, rising and politely removing his cap. "It seems that I stepped upon some person or some thing, a rudeness of which I should never have been guilty, if I had been able to see clearly."

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"You stepped," said a voice, "upon what was for sixty years a man, but is soon to become a corpse for all eternity."

"In that case," said Jacques, "my regret is all the greater for having disturbed you at a moment when you were engaged doubtless, as every good Christian should be at such a time, in settling your accounts with God."

"My accounts are all settled, Master Student: I have sinned like a man, but I have suffered like a martyr; and I hope that God, when weighing my sins and my sorrows, will find that the sum of the latter exceeds that of the former."

"Amen!" said Aubry, "I hope so too with all my heart. But if it will not fatigue you too much, my dear companion in adversity, — I say my dear companion, because I presume you bear no malice on account of the little accident which procured me the honor of your acquaintance a short time since, — if it will not fatigue you too much, I say, pray tell me how you succeeded in ascertaining that I am a student."

"I knew it by your costume, and by the inkhorn hanging at your belt, in the place where a gentleman carries his dagger."

"You say you knew it by my costume, — by the inkhorn? Ah! my dear companion, you told me, if I mistake not, that you are at the point of death?"

"I hope that I have at last reached the end of my sufferings: yes, I hope to fall asleep to-day on earth, to wake to-morrow in heaven."

"I in no wise dispute what you say," replied Jacques, "but I will venture to remind you that your present situation is not one in which it is customary to joke."

"Who says that I am joking?" murmured the dying man with a deep sigh.

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"What! you say that you recognized me by my costume, by the inkhorn at my belt, and I, look as hard as I may, cannot see my hands before my face."

"Possibly," rejoined the prisoner, "but when you have been fifteen years in a dungeon as I have, you will be able to see in the darkness, as well as you could see formerly in broad daylight."

"May the devil tear my eyes out rather than make them serve such an apprenticeship!" cried the student. "Fifteen years! you have been fifteen years in prison?"

"Fifteen or sixteen years, perhaps more, perhaps less. I long since ceased to count days or to measure time."

"You must have committed some abominable crime," cried the student, "to have been punished so pitilessly."

"I am innocent," replied the prisoner.

"Innocent!" cried Jacques aghast. "Ah! my dear comrade, I have already reminded you that this is no time for joking."

"And I replied that I was not joking."

"But still less is it a time for lying, for a joke is simply a relaxation of the mind, which offends neither heaven nor earth, while lying is a deadly sin, which compromises the soul's wellbeing."

"I have never lied."

"Why you say that you are innocent, and yet you have been fifteen years in prison?"

"Fifteen years more or less, I said."

"Ah!" cried Jacques, "and I also am innocent!"

"May God protect you then!" rejoined the dying man.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because a guilty man may hope for pardon; an innocent man, never!"

"What you say is very profound, my friend; but it's not consoling at all, do you know?"

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"I tell you the truth."

"Come," said Jacques, "come, you have some little peccadillo or other to reproach yourself with, have n't you? Between ourselves, tell me about it."

With that Jacques, who was really beginning to distinguish objects in the darkness, took a stool, carried it to the dying man's bedside, and, selecting a spot where there was a recess in the wall, placed the stool there and made himself as comfortable as possible in his improvised armchair.

"Ah! you say nothing, my friend; you have no confidence in me. Oh, well! I can understand that: fifteen years in prison may well have made you suspicious. My name is Jacques Aubry. I am twenty-two years old, and a student, as you have discovered, — according to what you say, at least. I had certain reasons which concern myself alone, for getting myself committed to the Châtelet; I have been here ten minutes; I have had the honor of making your acquaintance. There 's my whole life in a word, and you know me now as well as I know myself. Now, my dear companion, I will listen to you."

"I am Etienne Raymond," said the prisoner.

"Etienne Raymond," the student repeated; "I don't know that name."

"In the first place," said the prisoner, "you were a child when it pleased God to have me disappear from the world: in the next place, I was of little consequence in the world, so that no one noticed my absence."

"But what did you do? Who were you?

"I was the Connétable de Bourbon's confidential servant."

"Oho! and you had a share with him in betraying the state. In that case I am no longer surprised."

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"No; I refused to betray my master, that was all."

"Tell me about it; how did it happen?"

"I was at the constable's hôtel in Paris, while he was living at his château of Bourbon-l'Archambault. One day the captain of his guards arrived with a letter from monseigneur. The letter bade me instantly hand to the messenger a small sealed package which I would find in the duke's bedroom in a small closet near the head of his bed. I went with the captain to the bedroom, opened the closet, found the package in the place described, and handed it to the messenger, who immediately took his leave. An hour later an officer with a squad of soldiers came from the Louvre, and bade me throw open the duke's bedroom and show them a small closet near the head of the bed. I obeyed: they opened the closet, but failed to find what they sought, which was nothing less than the package the duke's messenger had carried away."

"The devil! the devil!" muttered Aubry, beginning to take a deep interest in the situation of his companion in misfortune.

"The officer made some terrible threats, to which I made no other reply than that I knew nothing about what he asked me; for if I had said that I had just handed the package to the duke's messenger, they could have pursued him and taken it from him."

"Peste!" Aubry interrupted; "that was clever of you, and you acted like a faithful and trusty retainer."

"Thereupon the officer gave me in charge to two guards, and returned to the Louvre with the others. In half an hour he returned with orders to take me to the château of Pierre-Encise at Lyons. They put irons on my feet, bound my hands, and tossed me into a carriage with a soldier on either side. Five days later I was confined in a prison, which, I ought to say, was far from

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being as dark and severe as this. But what does that matter?" muttered the dying man; "a prison 's a prison, and I have ended by becoming accustomed to this, as to all the others."

"Hum!" said Jacques Aubry; "that proves you to be a philosopher."

"Three days and three nights passed," continued Etienne Raymond; "at last, during the fourth night, I was awakened by a slight noise. I opened my eyes; my door turned upon its hinges; a woman closely veiled entered with the jailer. The jailer placed a lamp upon the table, and, at a sign from my nocturnal visitor, left the cell; thereupon she drew near my bed and raised her veil. I cried aloud."

"*Hein?* who was it, pray?" Aubry asked, edging closer to the narrator.

"It was Louise of Savoy herself, the Duchesse d'Angoulême in person; it was the Regent of France, the king's mother."

"Oho!" said Aubry; "and what was she doing with a poor devil like you?"

"She was in quest of the same sealed package which I had delivered to the duke's messenger, and which contained love letters written by the imprudent princess to the man she was now persecuting."

"Well, upon my word!" muttered Jacques between his teeth, "here 's a story most devilishly like the story of the Duchesse d'Etampes and Ascanio."

"Alas! the stories of all frivolous, love-sick princesses resemble one another," replied the prisoner, whose ears seemed to be as quick as his eyes were piercing; "but woe to the poor devils who happen to be involved in them!"

"Stay a moment! stay a moment, prophet of evil!"

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cried Aubry; "what the devil 's that you 're saying? I too am involved in the story of a frivolous, love-sick princess."

"Very well; if that is so, say farewell to the light of day, say farewell to life."

"Go to the devil with your predictions of the other world! What 's all that to me? I 'm not the one she loves, but Ascanio."

"Was it I that the regent loved?" retorted the prisoner. "Was it I, whose very existence they had never heard of? No, but I was placed between a barren love and a fruitful vengeance, and when they came together I was the one to be crushed."

"By Mahomet's belly! you are not very encouraging, my good man!" cried Aubry. "But let us return to the princess, for your narrative interests me beyond measure, just because it makes me tremble."

"The packet contained letters which she wanted, as I have told you. In exchange for them she promised me honors, dignities, titles; to see those letters again she would have extorted four hundred thousand crowns anew from another Semblançay, though he should pay for his complaisance on the scaffold.

"I replied that I had n't the letters, that I knew nothing about them, that I had no idea what she meant.

"Thereupon her munificent offers were succeeded by threats; but she found it no easier to intimidate than to bribe me, for I had told the truth. I had delivered the letters to my noble master's messenger.

"She left my cell in a furious rage, and for a year I heard nothing more. At the end of a year she returned, and the same scene was repeated.

"At that time I begged, I implored her to let me go

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free. I adjured her in the name of my wife and children; but to no purpose. I must give up the letters or die in prison.

"One day I found a file in my bread.

"My noble master had remembered me; absent, exiled, a fugitive as he was, of course he could not set me free by entreaty or by force. He sent one of his servants to France, who induced the jailer to hand me the file, telling me whence it came.

"I filed through one of the bars at my window. I made myself a rope with my sheets. I descended by the rope, but when I came to the end of it I felt in vain for the ground with my feet. I dropped, with God's name upon my lips, and broke my leg in the fall; a night patrol found me unconscious.

"I was thereupon transferred to the château of Chalons-sur-Saône. I remained there about two years, at the end of which time my persecutress made her appearance again. It was still the letters that brought her thither. This time she was accompanied by the torturer, and I was put to the question. This was useless barbarity, as she obtained no information, — indeed, she could obtain none. I knew nothing save that I had delivered the letters to the duke's messenger.

"One day at the bottom of my jug of water I found a bag filled with gold; once more my noble master bethought himself of his poor servant.

"I bribed a turnkey, or rather the miserable creature pretended to be bribed. At midnight he opened the door of my cell, and I went out. I followed him through several corridors; I could already feel the air that living men breathe, and thought that I was free, when guards rushed out upon us and bound us both. My guide had pretended to yield to my entreaties in order to get posses-

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sion of the gold he had seen in my hands, and then betrayed me to earn the reward offered to informers.

"They brought me to the Châtelet, to this cell.

"Here, for the last time, Louise of Savoy appeared; she was accompanied by the executioner.

"The prospect of death could have no other effect than the promises, threats, and torture. My hands were bound; a rope was passed through a ring and placed around my neck. I made the same reply as always to her demands, adding that she would fulfil my dearest wish by putting me to death, for I was driven to despair by my life of captivity.

"It was that feeling, doubtless, which made her hold her hand. She went out and the executioner followed her.

"Since then I have never seen her. What has become of my noble master? What has become of the cruel duchess? I have no idea, for since that time, some fifteen years perhaps, I have not exchanged a single word with a single living being."

"They are both dead," said Aubry.

"Both dead! the noble-hearted duke is dead! Why, he would still be a young man, not more than fifty-two. How did he die?"

"He was killed at the siege of Rome, and probably —"

Jacques was about to add, "by one of my friends," but he refrained, thinking that that might cause a coolness between the old man and himself. Jacques, as we know, was becoming very discreet.

"Probably?" the prisoner repeated.

"By a goldsmith named Benvenuto Cellini."

"Twenty years ago I would have cursed the murderer: to-day I say from the bottom of my heart, 'May his murderer be blessed!' Did they give my noble lord a burial worthy of the man?"

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"I think so: they built a tomb for him in the cathedral of Gaeta, and upon the tomb is an epitaph wherein it is said that, beside him who sleeps there, Alexander the Great was a sorry knave, and Cæsar an idle blackguard."

"And the other?"

"What other?"

"The woman who persecuted me?"

"Dead also: dead nine years since."

"Just so. One night, here in my cell, I saw a phantom kneeling and praying. I cried out and it disappeared. It was she asking my forgiveness."

"Do you think, then, that when death came upon her she relented?"

"I trust so, for her soul's sake."

"But in that case they should have set you free."

"She may have requested it, but I am of so little importance that I was probably forgotten in the excitement of that great catastrophe."

"And so you would likewise forgive her, as you are about to die?"

"Lift me up, young man, that I may pray for both of them." And the dying man, resting in Jacques Aubry's arms, coupled the names of his protector and persecutress in the same prayer: the man who had remembered him in his affection and the woman who had never forgotten him in her hatred, — the constable and the regent.

The prisoner was right. Jacques Aubry's eyes began to become accustomed to the darkness, and he could make out the dying man's features. He was a handsome old man, much emaciated by suffering, with a white beard and a bald head, — such a head as Domenichino dreamed of when painting his Confession of Saint Jerome.

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When his prayer was finished, he heaved a deep sigh, and fell back upon the bed; he had swooned.

Jacques thought that he was dead. He ran to the water-jug, however, poured some water in the hollow of his hand, and shook it over his face. The dying man returned to life once more.

"You did well to revive me, young man," said he, "and here is your reward."

"What is that?"

"A dagger."

"A dagger! how did it come into your hands?"

"Wait one moment. One day, when the turnkey brought my bread and water, he put the lamp upon the stool which happened to be standing near the wall. In the wall at that point was a protruding stone, and I saw some letters cut with a knife upon it. I had n't time to read them. But I dug up some earth with my hands, moistened it so as to make a sort of paste, and took an impression of the letters, which formed the word *Ultor*.

"What was the significance of that word, which means *avenger?* I returned to the stone. I tried to shake it. It moved like a tooth in its socket. By dint of patience and persistent efforts I succeeded in removing it from the wall. I immediately plunged my hand into the hole, and found this dagger.

"Thereupon the longing for liberty, which I had almost lost, returned to me in full force; I resolved to dig a passage-way from this to some dungeon near at hand with the dagger, and there concoct some plan of escape with its occupant. Besides, even if it all ended in failure, the digging and cutting was something to occupy my time; and when you have spent twenty years in a dungeon as I have, young man, you will realize what a formidable enemy time is."

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Aubry shuddered from head to foot. "Did you ever put your plan in execution?" he inquired.

"Yes, and more easily than I anticipated. After the twelve or fifteen years that I have been here, they have doubtless ceased to think of my escape as a possibility: indeed, it 's very likely that they no longer know who I am. They keep me, as they keep the chain hanging from yonder ring. The constable and the regent are dead, and they alone remembered me. Who would now recognize the name of Etienne Raymond, even in this place, if I should pronounce it? No one."

Aubry felt the perspiration starting from every pore as he thought of the oblivion into which this lost existence had fallen.

"Well?" he exclaimed questioningly, — "well?"

"For more than a year," said the old man, "I dug and dug, and I succeeded in making a hole under the wall large enough for a man to pass through."

"But what did you do with the dirt you took from the hole?"

"I strewed it over the floor of my cell, and trod it in by constantly walking upon it."

"Where is the hole?"

"Under my bed. For fifteen years no one has ever thought of moving it. The jailer came down into my cell only once a day. When he had gone, and the doors were closed, and the sound of his footsteps had died away, I would draw out my bed and set to work; when the time for his visit drew near, I would move the bed back to its place, and lie down upon it.

"Day before yesterday I lay down upon it never to rise again. I was at the end of my strength: to-day I am at the end of my life. You are most welcome, young man: you shall assist me to die, and I will make you my heir."

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"Your heir!" said Aubry in amazement.

"To be sure. I will leave you this dagger. You smile. What more precious heritage could a prisoner leave you? This dagger is freedom, perhaps."

"You are right," said Aubry, "and I thank you. Whither does this hole that you have dug lead?"

"I had not reached the other end, but I was very near it. Day before yesterday I heard voices in the cell beside this."

"The devil!" said Aubry, "and you think —"

"I think that you will have finished my work in a very few hours."

"Thanks," said Aubry, "thanks."

"And now, a priest. I would much like to see a priest," said the moribund.

"Wait, father, wait," said Aubry; "it is impossible that they would refuse such a request from a dying man."

He ran to the door, this time without stumbling, his eyes being somewhat accustomed to the darkness, and knocked with feet and hands both.

A turnkey came down.

"What's the matter, that you make such an uproar?" he demanded, "what do you want?"

"The old man here with me is dying," said Aubry, "and asks for a priest: can you refuse?"

"Hum!" grumbled the jailer, "I don't know why these fellows must all want priests. It's all right: we'll send him one."

Ten minutes later the priest appeared, carrying the viaticum and preceded by two sacristans, one with the crucifix, the other with the bell.

A solemn and impressive spectacle was the confession of this martyr, who had naught to disclose but the crimes

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of others, and who prayed for his enemies instead of asking pardon for himself.

Unimaginative as was Jacques Aubry, he fell upon his knees, and remembered the prayers of his childhood, which he thought he had forgotten.

When the prisoner had finished his confession, the priest bowed before him and asked his blessing.

The old man's face lighted up with a smile as radiant as the smile of God's elect; he extended one hand over the priest's head and the other toward Aubry, drew a deep breath, and fell back upon his pillow. That breath was his last.

The priest went out as he had come, attended by his subordinates, and the dungeon, lighted for a moment by the flickering flame of the candles, became dark once more.

Jacques Aubry was alone with the dead. It was a very depressing situation, especially in the light of the reflections to which it gave rise. The man who lay lifeless before him had been consigned to prison an innocent man, had remained there twenty years, and went out at last only because Death, the great liberator, came in search of him.

The light-hearted student could not recognize himself: for the first time he found himself confronted by stern reality; for the first time he looked in the face the bewildering vicissitudes of life, and the calm profundity of death.

Then a selfish thought began to take shape in his heart. He thought of himself, innocent like the dead man, and like him involved in the complications of one of those royal passions which crush and consume and destroy a life. Ascanio and he might disappear, as Etienne Raymond had disappeared: who would think of them?

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Gervaise perhaps, Benvenuto Cellini certainly.

But the former could do nothing but weep; and the other confessed his own powerlessness when he cried so loudly for the letter in Ascanio's possession.

His only chance of safety, his only hope, lay in the heritage of the dead man, an old dagger, which had already disappointed the expectations of its two former owners.

Jacques Aubry had hidden the dagger in his breast, and he nervously put his hand upon the hilt to make sure that it was still there.

At that moment the door opened, and men came in to remove the body.

"When shall you bring me my dinner?" Jacques asked. "I am hungry."

"In two hours," the jailer replied.

With that the student was left alone in the cell.

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XV.

AN HONEST THEFT.

AUBREY passed the two hours sitting upon his stool, without once moving: his mind was so active that it kept his body at rest.

At the appointed hour the turnkey came down, renewed the water, and changed the bread; this was what, in Châtelet parlance, was called a dinner.

The student remembered what the dying man told him, that the door of his cell would be opened but once in the twenty-four hours; however he still remained for a long while in the same place, absolutely motionless, fearing lest the event that had just occurred should cause some change in the routine of the prison.

He soon observed, through his air-hole, that it was beginning to grow dark. The day just passed had been a well filled day for him. In the morning, the examination by the magistrate; at noon, the duel with Marmagne; at one o'clock, lodged in prison; at three, the prisoner's death; and now his first attempts at securing his freedom.

A man does not pass many such days in his life.

Jacques Aubry rose at last, and walked to the door to listen for footsteps: then, in order that the dirt and the wall might leave no marks upon his doublet, he removed that portion of his costume, pulled the bed away from the corner, and found the opening of which his companion had spoken.

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He crawled like a snake into the narrow gallery, which was some eight feet deep, and which, after making a dip under the partition wall, ascended on the other side.

As soon as he plunged his dagger into the earth he knew by the sound that he would very soon accomplish his purpose, which was to open a passage into some place or other. What that place would be only a sorcerer could have told.

He kept actively at work, making as little noise as possible. From time to time he went out of the excavation as a miner does, in order to scatter the loose earth about the floor of his cell; otherwise it would eventually have blocked up the gallery; then he would crawl back, and set to work once more.

While Aubrey was working, Ascanio was thinking sadly of Colombe.

He too, as we have said, had been taken to the Châtelet; he too had been cast into a dungeon. But, it may have been by chance, it may have been at the duchess's suggestion, his quarters were a little less bare, consequently a little more habitable, than the student's.

But what did Ascanio care for a little more or a little less comfort. His dungeon was a dungeon all the same; his captivity a separation. He had not Colombe, who was more to him than light, or liberty, or life. Were Colombe with him in his dungeon, the dungeon would become an abode of bliss, a palace of enchantment.

The poor child had been so happy during the days immediately preceding his arrest! Thinking of his beloved by day, and sitting by her side at night, he had never thought that his happiness might some day come to an end. And if, sometimes, in the midst of his felicity, the iron hand of doubt had clutched his heart, he had, like one threatened by danger from some un-

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known source, promptly put aside all uneasiness concerning the future that he might lose none of his present bliss.

And now he was in prison, alone, far from Colombe, who was perhaps imprisoned like himself, perhaps a prisoner in some convent, whence she could escape in no other way than by going to the chapel, where the husband whom they sought to force upon her awaited her.

Two redoubtable passions were standing guard at their cell doors; the love of Madame d'Etampes at Ascanio's, the ambition of Comte d'Orbec at Colombe's.

As soon as he was alone in his dungeon, therefore, Ascanio became very sad and down-hearted; his was one of those clinging natures which need the support of some robust organization; he was one of those slender, graceful flowers, which bend before the first breath of the tempest, and straighten up again only in the vivifying rays of the sun.

Had Benvenuto been in his place, his first thought would have been to examine the doors, sound the walls, and stamp upon the floor, to see if one or the other would not afford his quick and combative mind some possible means of escape. But Ascanio sat down upon his bed, let his head fall upon his breast, and whispered Colombe's name. It never occurred to him that one could escape by any possible means from a dungeon behind three iron doors and surrounded by walls six feet thick.

The dungeon was, as we have said, a little less bare and a little more habitable than that assigned to Jacques. It contained a bed, a table, two chairs, and an old rush mat. Furthermore, a lamp was burning upon a stone projection, doubtless arranged for that purpose. Beyond question it was a cell set apart for privileged prisoners.

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There was also a great difference in the matter of food: instead of the bread and water which was brought to the student once a day, Ascanio enjoyed two daily repasts, a privilege somewhat neutralized by the consequent necessity of seeing the jailer twice in the twenty-four hours. These repasts, it should be said to the credit of the philanthropic administration of the Châtelet, were not altogether execrable.

Ascanio thought but little of such paltry details: his was one of those delicate feminine organizations which seem to exist on perfume and dew. Without awaking from his reverie he ate a bit of bread, drank a few drops of wine, and continued to think of Colombe and of Benvenuto Cellini; of Colombe as of her to whom all his love was given, of Cellini as of him in whom lay all his hope.

Indeed, up to that moment Ascanio had never been concerned with any of the cares or details of existence. Benvenuto lived for both, and Ascanio was content to breathe, to dream of some lovely work of art, and to love Colombe. He was like the fruit which grows upon a sturdy tree, and draws all its life from the tree.

And even now, perilous as was his situation, if he could have seen Benvenuto Cellini at the moment of his arrest, or at the moment of his incarceration, and Benvenuto had said to him, with a warm grasp of his hand, "Have no fear, Ascanio, for I am watching over you and Colombe," his confidence in the master was so great that, relying upon that promise alone, he would have waited without anxiety for the prison doors to be thrown open, sure that thrown open they would be, in spite of bars and locks.

But he had not seen Benvenuto, and Benvenuto did not know that his cherished pupil, the son of his Stefana,

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was a prisoner. It would have taken a whole day to carry the intelligence to him at Fontainebleau, assuming that it had occurred to any one to do it, another day to return to Paris, and in two days the enemies of the lovers might gain a long lead upon their defender.

So it was that Ascanio passed the rest of the day and the whole of the night following his arrest without sleep, sometimes pacing back and forth in his cell, sometimes sitting down, and occasionally throwing himself upon the bed, which was provided with white sheets, — a special mark of favor which proved that Ascanio had been particularly commended to the attention of the authorities. During that day and night and the following morning nothing worthy of note occurred, unless it was the regular visit of the jailer to bring his food.

About two o'clock in the afternoon, as nearly as the prisoner could judge by his reckoning of the time, he thought that he heard voices near at hand: it was a dull, indistinct murmur, but evidently caused by the vocal organs of human beings. Ascanio listened and walked toward the point whence the sound seemed to come; it was at one of the corners of his cell. He silently put his ear to the wall and to the ground, and found that the voices apparently came from beneath the floor.

It was evident that he had neighbors who were separated from him only by a thin partition or an equally thin floor. After some two hours the sounds ceased, and all was still once more.

Toward night the noise began again, but this time it was of a different nature. It was not that which would be made by two persons speaking together, but consisted of dull, hurried blows as of some one cutting stone. It came from the same place, did not cease for a second, and seemed to come nearer and nearer.

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Absorbed as Ascanio was in his own thoughts, this noise seemed to him deserving of some attention none the less, so he sat with his eyes glued to the spot whence it came. He judged that it must be near midnight, but he did not once think of sleeping, notwithstanding that he had not slept for so many hours.

The noise continued: as it was long past the usual hour for work, it was evidently some prisoner seeking to escape. Ascanio smiled sadly at the thought that the poor devil, who would think for a moment, mayhap, that he was at liberty, would find that he had simply changed his cell.

At last the noise approached so near that Ascanio ran and seized his lamp, and returned with it to the corner; almost at the same moment the earth rose up in that spot, and as it fell away disclosed a human head.

Ascanio uttered an exclamation of wonder, followed by a cry of joy, to which a no less delighted cry made answer. The head belonged to Jacques Aubry.

In an instant, thanks to the assistance rendered by Ascanio to the unexpected visitor who made his appearance in such extraordinary fashion, the two friends were in one another's arms.

As will readily be conceived, the first questions and answers were somewhat incoherent; but at last, after exchanging a few disconnected exclamations, they succeeded in restoring some semblance of order to their thoughts, and in casting some light upon recent events. Ascanio to be sure had almost nothing to say, and everything to learn.

Eventually Aubry told him the whole story: how he had returned to the Hôtel de Nesle simultaneously with Benvenuto; how they had learned almost at the same moment of the arrest of Ascanio and the abduction of

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Colombe; how Benvenuto had rushed off to his studio like a madman, shouting, "To the casting! to the casting!" and he, Aubry, to the Châtelet. Of what had taken place at the Hôtel de Nesle since that time the student could tell him nothing.

But to the general narrative of the Iliad succeeded the private adventures of Ulysses. Aubry described to Ascanio his disappointment at his failure to get committed to prison; his visit to Gervaise, and her denunciation of him to the lieutenant criminal; his terrible examination, which had no other result than the paltry fine of twenty Paris sous, a result most insulting to the honor of Gervaise; and finally his encounter with Marmagne just as he was beginning to despair of procuring his own incarceration. From that point he related everything that had happened to him up to the moment when, utterly in the dark as to what cell he was about to enter, he had thrust his head through the last crust of earth, and discerned by the light of his lamp his friend Ascanio.

Whereupon the friends once more embraced with great heartiness.

"Now," said Jacques Aubry, "listen to me, Ascanio, for there is no time to lose."

"But first of all," said Ascanio, "tell me of Colombe. Where is Colombe?"

"Colombe? I can't tell you. With Madame d'Etampes, I think."

"With Madame d'Etampes!" cried Ascanio, — "her rival!"

"So what they say of the duchess's love for you is true, is it?"

Ascanio blushed and stammered some unintelligible words.

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"Oh, you need n't blush for that!" cried Aubry. "Deuce take me! a duchess! and a duchess who 's the king's mistress at that! I should never have any such luck. But let us come back to business."

"Yes," said Ascanio, "let us come back to Colombe."

"Bah! I 'm not talking about Colombe. I 'm talking about a letter."

"What letter?"

"A letter the Duchesse d'Etampes wrote you."

"Who told you that I have a letter from the Duchesse d'Etampes in my possession?"

"Benvenuto Cellini."

"Why did he tell you that?"

"Because he must have that letter, because it is absolutely essential that he should have it, because I agreed to take it to him, because all I have done was done to get possession of that letter."

"But for what purpose does Benvenuto want the letter?"

"Ah! faith, I 've no idea, and it does n't concern me. He said to me, 'I must have that letter.' I said to him, 'Very good, I will get it for you.' I have had myself put in prison in order to get it; so give it me, and I agree to deliver it to Benvenuto. Well, what 's the matter?"

This last question was induced by the cloud which spread over Ascanio's face.

"The matter is, my poor Aubry," said he, "that your trouble is thrown away."

"How so?" cried Aubry. "Have n't you the letter still?"

"It is here," said Ascanio, placing his hand upon the pocket of his doublet.

"Ah! that 's well. Give it to me, and I will take it to Benvenuto."

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"That letter will never leave me, Jacques."

"Why so?"

"Because I don't know what use Benvenuto proposes to make of it."

"He means to use it to save you."

"And to crush the Duchesse d'Etampes, it may be. Aubry, I will not help to ruin a woman."

"But this woman seeks to ruin you. This woman detests you: no, I am wrong, she adores you."

"And you would have me, in return for that feeling —"

"Why, it 's exactly the same as if she hated you since you don't love her. Besides, it 's she who has done all this."

"What! she who has done it?"

"Why, yes, it was she who caused your arrest, and carried off Colombe."

"Who told you that?

"No one; but who else could it have been?"

"Why the provost, or D'Orbec, or Marmagne, to whom you admit that you told the whole story."

"Ascanio! Ascanio!" cried Jacques in despair, "you are destroying yourself!"

"I prefer to destroy myself, rather than do a dastardly deed, Aubry."

"But this is no dastardly deed, for Benvenuto is the one who undertakes to do it."

"Listen to me, Aubry," said Ascanio, "and don't be angry at what I say. If Benvenuto stood in your place, and should say to me, 'It was Madame d'Etampes, your enemy, who caused your arrest, who carried off Colombe, who now has her in her power and intends to force her to do what she does not wish to do, — I cannot save Colombe unless I have that letter,' — I would make

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him swear that he would not show it to the king, and then I would give it to him. But Benvenuto is not here, and I am not certain that it is the duchess who is persecuting me. This letter would not be safe in your hands, Aubry: forgive me, but you yourself admit that you are an arrant chatterbox."

"I promise you, Ascanio, that the day I have just passed has aged me ten years."

"You may lose the letter, or, with the best intentions, I know, make an injudicious use of it, Aubry, so the letter will remain where it is."

"But, my dear fellow," cried Jacques, "remember that Benvenuto himself said that nothing but this letter can save you."

"Benvenuto will save me without that, Aubry; Benvenuto has the king's word that he will grant him whatever favor he asks on the day that his Jupiter is safely cast. When you thought that Benvenuto was going mad because he shouted, 'To the casting!' he was beginning to rescue me."

"But suppose the casting should be unsuccessful?" said Aubry.

"There's no danger," rejoined Ascanio with a smile.

"But that sometimes happens to the most skilful founders in France, so I am told."

"The most skilful founders in France are mere schoolboys compared to Benvenuto."

"But how much time is required for the casting?"

"Three days."

"And how much more before the statue can be put before the king?"

"Three days more."

"Six or seven days in all. And suppose Madame d'Etampes forces Colombe to marry D'Orbec within six days?"

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"Madame d'Etampes has no power over Colombe. Colombe will resist."

"Very true, but the provost has power over Colombe as his daughter, and King François I. has power over Colombe as his subject; suppose the provost and the king both order her to marry him?"

Ascanio became frightfully pale.

"Suppose that when Benvenuto demands your liberty, Colombe is already the wife of another, what will you do with your liberty then?"

Ascanio passed one hand across his brow to wipe away the cold sweat which the student's words caused to start thereon, while with the other hand he felt in his pocket for the precious letter; but just as Aubry felt certain that he was on the point of yielding, he shook his head as if to banish all irresolution.

"No!" he said, "no! To no one save Benvenuto. Let us talk of something else."

These words he uttered in a tone which indicated that, for the moment at least, it was useless to insist.

"In that case," said Aubry, apparently forming a momentous resolution; "in that case, my friend, if we are to talk on other subjects we may as well do it to-morrow morning, or later in the day, for I am afraid we may remain here for some time. For my own part, I confess that I am worn out by my tribulations of the day and my labor to-night, and shall not be sorry for a little rest. Do you remain here, and I will go back to my own cell. When you want to see me again, do you call me. Meanwhile, spread this mat over the hole I have made, so that our communications may not be cut off. Good night! the night brings counsel, they say, and I hope that I shall find you more reasonable to-morrow morning."

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With that, and refusing to listen to the observations of Ascanio, who sought to detain him, Jacques Aubry plunged head first into his gallery, and crawled back to his cell. Ascanio, meanwhile, following up the advice his friend had given him, dragged the mat into the corner of his cell as soon as the student's legs had disappeared. The means of communication between the two cells thereupon disappeared altogether.

He then tossed his doublet upon one of the two chairs which, with the table and the lamp, constituted the furnishings of his apartment, stretched himself out upon the bed, and, overdone with fatigue as he was, soon fell asleep, his bodily weariness carrying the day over his mental torture.

Aubry, instead of following Ascanio's example, although he was quite as much in need of sleep as he, sat down upon his stool, and began to reflect deeply, which, as the reader knows, was so entirely contrary to all his habits, that it was evident that he was meditating some grand stroke.

The student's immobility lasted about fifteen minutes, after which he rose slowly, and, with the step of a man whose irresolution is at an end for good and all, walked to the hole, and crawled into it again, but this time with so much caution and so noislessly, that, when he reached the other end and raised the mat, he was overjoyed to perceive that the operation had not aroused his friend.

That was all that the student wished. With even greater caution than he had theretofore exhibited, he crept stealthily forth from his underground gallery, and approached with bated breath the chair on which Ascanio's doublet lay. With one eye fixed upon the sleeping youth, and his ears on the alert for the slightest sound, he took from the pocket the precious letter so

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eagerly coveted by Cellini, and placed in the envelope a note from Gervaise, which he folded in exactly the same shape as the duchess's letter, sure that Ascanio would believe, so long as he did not open it, that lovely Anne d'Heilly's missive was still in his possession.

As silently as ever he stole back to the mat, raised it, crawled into the hole once more, and disappeared like the phantoms who sink through trap-doors at the opera.

It was high time, for he was no sooner back in his cell, than he heard Ascanio's door grinding on its hinges, and his friend's voice crying, in the tone of one suddenly aroused from sleep, —

"Who 's there?"

"I," responded a soft voice, "do not be afraid, for it is a friend."

Ascanio, who was but half dressed, rose at the sound of the voice, which he seemed to recognize, and saw by the light of his lamp a veiled woman standing by the door. She slowly approached him and raised her veil. He was not mistaken, — it was Madame d'Etampes.

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XVI.

WHEREIN IT IS PROVED THAT A GRISETTE'S LETTER, WHEN IT IS BURNED, MAKES AS MUCH FLAME AND ASHES AS A DUCHESS'S.

THERE was upon Anne d'Heilly's mobile features an expression of sadness mingled with compassion, which deceived Ascanio completely, and confirmed him, even before she had opened her mouth, in the impression that she was entirely innocent of any share in the catastrophe of which he and Colombe were victims.

"You here, Ascanio!" she said in a melodious voice; "you, to whom I would have given a palace to live in, I find in a prison!"

"Ah, madame!" cried the youth, "it is true, is it not, that you know nothing of the persecution to which we are subjected?"

"Did you suspect me for an instant, Ascanio?" said the duchess; "in that case you have every reason to hate me, and I can only bewail in silence my ill fortune in being so little known to him I know so well."

"No, madame, no," said Ascanio; "I was told that you were responsible for it all, but I refused to believe it."

"'T was well done of you! Ascanio, you do not love me, but with you hatred at least is not synonymous with injustice. You were right, Ascanio; not only am I not responsible for it, but I knew nothing whatever about it. It was the provost, Messire d'Estourville: he learned the

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whole story, I know not how, told it all to the king, and obtained from him the order to arrest you and recover Colombe."

"And Colombe is with her father?" demanded Ascanio eagerly.

"No, Colombe is with me."

"With you, madame!" cried the young man. "Why with you?"

"She is very lovely, Ascanio," murmured the duchess, "and I can understand why you prefer her to all the women in the world, even though the most loving of them all offers you the richest of duchies."

"I love Colombe, madame," said Ascanio, "and you know that love, which is a treasure sent from Heaven, is to be preferred to all earthly treasures."

"Yes, Ascanio, yes, you love her above everything. For a moment I hoped that your passion for her was only a passing fancy; I was mistaken. Yes, I realize now," she added with a sigh, "that to keep you apart any longer would be to run counter to God's will."

"Ah, madame!" cried Ascanio, clasping his hands, "God has placed in your hands the power to bring us together. Be noble and generous to the end, madame, and make two children happy who will love you and bless you all their lives."

"Yes," said the duchess. "I am vanquished, Ascanio; yes, I am ready to protect and defend you; but alas! it may be too late even now."

"Too late! what do you mean?" cried Ascanio.

"It may be, Ascanio, it may be that at this moment I am lost myself."

"Lost, madame! how so, in God's name?"

"For having loved you."

"For having loved me! You, lost because of me!"

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"Yes, imprudent creature that I am, lost because of you; lost because I wrote to you."

"How so? I do not understand you, madame."

"You do not understand that the provost, armed with an order from the king, has directed a general search to be made at the Hôtel de Nesle? You do not understand that this search, the principal purpose of which is to find proofs of your affair with Colombe, will be most rigorously carried out in your bedroom."

"What then?" demanded Ascanio, impatiently.

"Why," continued the duchess, "if they find that letter, which in a moment of frenzy I wrote to you, if it is recognized as mine, if it is laid before the king, whom I was then deceiving, and whom I was willing to betray for you, do you not understand that my power is at an end from that moment? Do you not understand that I can then do nothing either for you or for Colombe? Do you not understand, in short, that I am lost?"

"Oh!" cried Ascanio, "have no fear, madame! There is no danger of that; the letter is here; it has never left me."

The duchess breathed freely once more, and the expression of her face changed from anxiety to joy.

"It has never left you, Ascanio!" she repeated; "it has never left you! To what sentiment, pray tell me, do I owe the fact that that fortunate letter has never left you?"

"To prudence, madame," murmured Ascanio.

"Prudence! mon Dieu! mon Dieu! I am wrong once more! And yet I surely should be convinced ere this. Prudence! Ah well!" she added, seeming to make a powerful effort to restrain her feelings, "in that case, as I have naught but your prudence to thank, Ascanio, do you think it very prudent to keep it upon your person,

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when they may come to your cell at any moment and search you by force? do you think it prudent, I say, to keep a letter which, if it is found, will put the only person who can save you and Colombe in a position where it will be impossible for her to help you?"

"Madame," said Ascanio, in his melodious voice, and with that tinge of melancholy which all pure hearts feel when they are forced to doubt, "I know not if the purpose to save Colombe and myself exists at the bottom of your heart as it does upon your lips; I know not whether the desire to see that letter again, and nothing more, is the motive of your visit to me; I know not whether, as soon as you have it in your possession, you may not lay aside this *rôle* of protectress which you have assumed, and become our enemy once more; but this I do know, madame, that the letter is yours, that it belongs to you, and that the moment you claim it I cease to have the right to keep it from you."

Ascanio rose, went straight to the chair upon which his doublet lay, put his hand in the pocket, and took out a letter, the envelope of which the duchess recognized at a glance.

"Here, madame," he said, "is the paper you are so anxious to possess, and which can be of no use to me, while it may injure you seriously. Take it, tear it up, destroy it. I have done my duty; you may do what you choose."

"Ah! yours is indeed a noble heart, Ascanio!" cried the duchess, acting in obedience to one of those generous impulses which are sometimes found in the most corrupt hearts.

"Some one comes, madame! take care!" cried Ascanio.

"True," said the duchess.

At the sound of approaching footsteps she hastily

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thrust the paper into the flame of the lamp, which consumed it in an instant. The duchess did not let it drop until the flame had almost scorched her fingers, when the letter, three fourths consumed, drifted slowly downward: when it reached the floor it was entirely reduced to ashes, but the duchess was not content until she had placed her foot upon them.

At that moment the provost appeared in the doorway.

"I was told that you were here, madame," he said, looking uneasily from the duchess to Ascanio, "and I hastened to descend and place myself at your service. Is there aught in which I, or they who are under my orders, can be of any use to you?"

"No, messire," she replied, unable to conceal the feeling of intense joy which overflowed from her heart upon her face. "No, but I am none the less obliged to you for your readiness and your good will; I came simply to question this young man whom you arrested, and to ascertain if he is really as guilty as he was said to be."

"And what is your conclusion?" queried the provost, in a tone to which he could not refrain from imparting a slight tinge of irony.

"That Ascanio is less guilty than I thought. I beg you, therefore, messire, to show him every consideration in your power. The poor child is in wretched quarters. Could you not give him a better room?"

"We will look to it to-morrow, madame, for you know that your wishes are commands to me. Have you any other commands, and do you wish to continue your examination?"

"No, messire," was the reply, "I know all that I wished to know."

With that the duchess left the dungeon, darting at Ascanio a parting glance of mingled gratitude and passion.

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The provost followed her and the door closed behind them.

"Pardieu!" muttered Jacques Aubry, who had not lost a word of the conversation between the duchess and Ascanio. "Pardieu! it was time."

It had been Marmagne's first thought on recovering consciousness to send word to the duchess that he had received a wound which might well prove to be mortal, and that before he breathed his last he desired to impart to her a secret of the deepest moment. Upon receipt of that message the duchess hastened to his side. Marmagne then informed her that he had been attacked and wounded by a certain student named Jacques Aubry, who was endeavoring to gain admission to the Châtelet in order to get speech of Ascanio and carry to Cellini a letter that was in Ascanio's possession.

The duchess needed to hear no more, and, bitterly cursing the passion which had led her once more to overstep the limits of her ordinary prudence, she hurried to the Châtelet although it was two o'clock in the morning, demanded to be shown to Ascanio's cell, and there enacted the scene we have described, which had ended in accordance with her wishes so far as she knew, although Ascanio was not altogether deceived.

As Jacques Aubry said, it was high time.

But only half of his task was accomplished, and the most difficult part remained to do. He had the letter which had come so near being destroyed forever; but in order that it should have its full effect it must be in Cellini's hands, not in Jacques Aubry's.

Now Jacques Aubry was a prisoner, very much a prisoner, and he had learned from his predecessor that it was no easy matter to get out of the Châtelet, once one was safely lodged therein. He was therefore, we might say,

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in much the same plight as the rooster who found the pearl, greatly perplexed as to the use to be made of his treasure.

To attempt to escape by resorting to violence would be utterly vain. He might with his dagger kill the keeper who brought his food, and take his keys and his clothes; but not only was that extreme method repugnant to the student's kindly disposition, — it did not afford sufficiently strong hopes of success. There were ten chances to one that he would be recognized, searched, relieved of his precious letter, and thrust back into his cell.

To attempt to escape by cunning was even less hopeful. The dungeon was eight or ten feet underground, there were huge iron bars across the air-hole through which the one faint ray of light filtered into his cell. It would take months to loosen one of those bars, and, suppose one of them to be removed, where would the fugitive then find himself? — in some courtyard with insurmountable walls, where he would inevitably be found the next morning?

Bribery was his only remaining resource; but, as a consequence of the sentence pronounced by the lieutenant criminal, whereby Gervaise was awarded twenty Paris sous for the loss of her honor, the prisoner's whole fortune was reduced to ten Paris sous, a sum utterly inadequate to tempt the lowest jailer of the vilest prison, and which could not decently be offered to the turnkey of a royal fortress.

Jacques Aubry was therefore, we are forced to confess, in the direst perplexity.

From time to time it seemed as if a hopeful idea passed through his mind; but it was evident that it was likely to entail serious consequences, for each time that it returned, with the persistence characteristic of hopeful

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ideas, Aubry's face grew perceptibly darker, and he heaved deep sighs, which proved that the poor fellow was undergoing an internal conflict of the most violent description.

This conflict was so violent and so prolonged that Aubry did not once think of sleep the whole night long: he passed the time in striding to and fro, in sitting down and standing up. It was the first time that he had ever kept vigil all night for purposes of reflection; his previous experiences in that line had been on convivial occasions only.

At daybreak the struggle seemed to have ended in the complete triumph of one of the opposing forces, for Jacques heaved a more heart-breaking sigh than any he had yet achieved, and threw himself upon his bed like a man completely crushed.

His head had hardly touched the pillow when he heard steps on the staircase, the key grated in the lock, the door turned upon its hinges, and two officers of the law appeared in the doorway; they were the lieutenant criminal and his clerk.

The annoyance of the visit was tempered by the student's gratification in recognizing two old acquaintances.

"Aha! my fine fellow," said the magistrate, recognizing Aubry, "so it 's you, is it, and you succeeded after all in getting into the Châtelet? *Tudieu!* what a rake you are! You seduce young women and run young noblemen through the body! But beware! a nobleman's life is more expensive than a grisette's honor, and you'll not be quit of this affair for twenty Paris sous!"

Alarming as the worthy magistrate's words undoubtedly were, the tone in which he uttered them reassured the prisoner to some extent. This jovial-faced individual, into whose hands he had had the good luck to fall, was

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such a good fellow to all appearance that it was impossible to think of him in connection with anything deadly. To be sure it was not the same with his clerk, who nodded his head approvingly at each word that fell from his principal's lips. It was the second time that Jacques Aubry had seen the two men side by side, and, deeply engrossed as he was by his own precarious situation, he could not forbear some internal reflections upon the whimsical chance which had coupled together two beings so utterly opposed to each other in character and feature.

The examination began. Jacques Aubry made no attempt at concealment. He declared that, having recognized the Vicomte de Marmagne as a man who had on several occasions betrayed his confidence, he seized his page's sword and challenged him; that Marmagne had accepted the challenge, and that after exchanging a few thrusts the viscount fell. More than that he did not know.

"You know no more than that! you know no more than that!" muttered the judge. "Faith, I should say that that was quite enough, and your affair's as clear as day, especially as the Vicomte de Marmagne is one of Madame d'Etampes's great favorites. So it seems that she has complained of you to the higher powers, my boy."

"The devil!" exclaimed the scholar, beginning to feel decidedly ill at ease. "Tell me, Monsieur le Juge, is the affair so bad as you say?"

"Worse! my dear friend, worse! I am not in the habit of frightening those who come before me; but I give you warning of this, so that if you have any arrangements to make — "

"Arrangements to make!" cried the student. "Tell me, Monsieur le Lieutenant Criminel, for God's sake! do you think my life 's in danger?"

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"Certainly it is, certainly. What! you attack a nobleman in the street, you force him to fight, you run a sword through him, and then you ask if your life 's in danger! Yes, my dear friend, yes, — in very great danger."

"But such affairs happen every day, and I don't see that the guilty ones are prosecuted."

"True, among gentlemen, my young friend. Oh! when it pleases two gentlemen to cut each other's throats, it 's a privilege of their rank, and the king has nothing to say; but if the common people take it into their head some fine day to fight with gentlemen, as they are twenty times as numerous, there would soon be no more gentlemen, which would be a great pity."

"How many days do you think my trial will last?"

"Five or six, in all likelihood."

"What!" cried the student, "five or six days! No more than that?"

"Why should it? The facts are clear enough; a man dies, you confess that you killed him, and justice is satisfied. However," added the judge, assuming a still more benevolent expression, "if two or three days more would be agreeable to you — "

"Very agreeable."

"Oh well! we will spin out the report, and gain time in that way. You are a good fellow at heart, and I shall be delighted to do something for you."

"Thanks," said the student.

"And now," said the judge, rising, "have you any further request to make?"

"I would like to see a priest: is it impossible?"

"No; it is your right."

"In that case, Monsieur le Juge, ask them to send one to me."

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"I will do your errand. No ill will, my young friend."

"Good lack! on the contrary, I am deeply grateful."

"Master Student," said the clerk in an undertone, stepping to Aubrey's side, "would you be willing to do me a favor?"

"Gladly," said Aubrey; "what might it be?"

"It may be that you have friends or relatives to whom you intend to bequeath all your possessions?"

"Friends? I have but one, and he 's a prisoner like myself. Relatives? I have only cousins, and very distant cousins at that. So, say on, Master Clerk, say on."

"Monsieur, I am a poor man, father of a family, with five children."

"What then?"

"I have never had any opportunities in my position, which I fill, as you can testify, with scrupulous probity. All my confrères are promoted over my head."

"Why is that?"

"Why? Ah! why? I will tell you."

"Do so."

"Because they are lucky."

"Aha!"

"And why are they lucky

"That 's what I would ask you, Master Clerk."

"And that 's what I am about to tell you, Master Student."

"I shall be very glad to know."

"They are lucky," — here the clerk lowered his voice a half-tone more, — "they are lucky because they have the rope a man was hanged with in their pocket: do you understand?"

"No."

"You 're rather dull. You will make a will, eh?"

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"A will! why should I?"

"Dame! so that there may be no contest among your heirs. Very good! write in your will that you authorize Marc-Boniface Grimoineau, clerk to Monsieur le Lieutenant Criminel, to claim from the executioner a bit of the rope you are hanged by."

"Ah!" said Aubry, in a choking voice. "Yes, now I understand."

"And you will grant my request?"

"To be sure!"

"Young man, remember what you have promised me. Many have made the same promise, but some have died intestate, others have written my name, Marc-Boniface Grimoineau so badly that there was a chance for cavilling; and others still, who were guilty, monsieur, on my word of honor very guilty, have been acquitted, and gone off elsewhere to be hanged; so that I was really in despair when you fell in my way."

"Very well, Master Clerk, very well; if I am hanged, you shall have what you want, never fear."

"Oh, you will be, monsieur, you will be, don't you doubt it!"

"Well, Grimoineau," said the judge.

"Here I am, monsieur, here I am. So it's a bargain, Master Student?"

"It's a bargain."

"On your word of honor?"

"On my word!"

"I think that I shall get it at last," muttered the clerk as he withdrew. "I will go home and tell my wife and children the good news."

He left the cell on the heels of the lieutenant criminal, who was grumbling good-humoredly at having to wait so long.

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XVII.

WHEREIN IT IS PROVED THAT TRUE FRIENDSHIP IS CAPABLE OF CARRYING DEVOTION TO THE MARRYING POINT.

AUBRY, once more alone, was soon more deeply absorbed in thought than before; and the reader will agree that there was ample food for thought in his conversation with the lieutenant criminal. We hasten to say, however, that one who could have read his thoughts would have found that the situation of Ascanio and Colombe, depending as it did upon the letter in his possession, occupied the first place, and that before thinking of himself, a thing which he proposed to do in good time, he deliberated as to what was to be done for them.

He had been meditating thus for half an hour more or less, when the door of his cell opened once more, and the turnkey appeared on the threshold.

"Are you the man who sent for a priest?" he growled.

"To be sure I am," said Jacques.

"Deuce take me, if I know what they all want with a damned monk," muttered the turnkey; "but what I do know is that they can't leave a poor man in peace for five minutes. Come in, come in, father," he continued, standing aside to allow the priest to pass, "and be quick about it."

With that he closed the door, still grumbling, and left the new comer alone with the prisoner.

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"Was it you who sent for me, my son?" the priest asked.

"Yes, father," replied the student.

"Do you wish to confess?"

"No, not just that: I wish to talk with you concerning a simple case of conscience."

"Say on, my son," said the priest, seating himself upon the stool, "and if any feeble light that I can give you will help you — "

"It was to ask your advice that I ventured to send for you."

"I am listening."

"Father," said Aubry, "I am a great sinner."

"Alas!" said the priest; "happy is the man who acknowledges it."

"But that is not all; not only am I a great sinner myself, as I said, but I have led others into sin."

"Is there any way of undoing the harm you have done?"

"I think so, father, I think so. She whom I dragged with me into the pit was an innocent young girl."

"You seduced her, did you?"

"Seduced; yes, father, that is the word."

"And you wish to atone for your sin?"

"That at least is my intention."

"There is but one way to do it."

"I know it well, and that is why I have been undecided so long: if there were two ways I would have chosen the other."

"You wish to marry her?"

"One moment, no! I will not lie: no, father, I do not wish to do it, but I am resigned."

"A warmer, more devoted feeling would be much better."

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"What would you have, father? There are people who are born to marry, and others to remain single. Celibacy was my vocation, and nothing less than my present situation, I swear — "

"Very well, my son, the sooner the better, as you may repent of your virtuous intentions."

"What will be the earliest possible moment?" Aubry asked.

"Dame!" said the priest, "as it is a marriage *in extremis*, there will be no difficulty about the necessary dispensations, and I think that by day after to-morrow — "

"Day after to-morrow let it be," said the student with a sigh.

"But the young woman?"

"What of her?"

"Will she consent?"

"To what?"

"To the marriage."

"Pardieu! will she consent? That she will, with thanks. Such propositions are n't made to her every day."

"Then there is no obstacle?"

"None."

"Your parents?"

"Absent."

"And hers?"

"Unknown."

"Her name?"

"Gervaise-Perrette Popinot."

"Do you wish me to tell her of your purpose?"

"If you will kindly take that trouble, father, I shall be truly grateful."

"She shall be informed this very day."

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"Tell me, father, tell me, could you possibly hand her a letter?"

"No, my son: we who are admitted to minister to the prisoners have sworn to deliver no message for them to any person until after their death. When that time comes, I will do whatever you choose."

"Thanks, it would be useless; marriage it must be, then," muttered Aubry.

"You have nothing else to say to me?"

"Nothing, except that, if you doubt the truth of what I say, and if she makes any objection to granting my request, you will find in the office of the lieutenant-criminal a complaint lodged by said Gervaise-Perrette Popinot, which will prove that what I have said is the exact truth."

"Rely upon me to smooth away all obstacles," replied the priest, who realized that Jacques's proposed action was not prompted by enthusiasm for the marriage, but that he was yielding to necessity; "and two days hence —"

"Two days hence —"

"You will have restored her honor to the woman whose honor you took from her."

"Alas!" muttered the student with a deep sigh.

"Ah, my son!" said the priest, "the more a sacrifice costs you, the greater pleasure it affords to God."

"By Mahomet's belly!" cried Jacques; "in that case God should be very grateful to me! go, father, go!"

Indeed, Jacques had had to overcome very bitter opposition in his own mind before arriving at such a resolution. As he had told Gervaise, he had inherited his antipathy to the marriage tie from his father, and nothing less than his friendship for Ascanio, and the thought that it was he who had caused his ruin, together with

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the incentive afforded by the noblest examples of self-sacrificing devotion to be found in history, — nothing less than all of this was necessary to bring him to the pitch of abnegation at which he had now arrived.

But, the reader may ask, where lies the connection between the marriage of Gervaise and Aubry, and the happiness of Ascanio and Colombe, and how did Aubry expect to save his friend by marrying his mistress? To such a question I can only answer that the reader lacks penetration; to which the reader may retort, to be sure, that it is not his business to have that quality. In that case, I beg him to take the trouble to read the end of this chapter, which he might have passed over had he been endowed with a more subtle intellect.

When the priest had gone, Aubry, recognizing the impossibility of drawing back, seemed to become more tranquil. It is characteristic of resolutions, even the most momentous, to bring tranquillity in their wake: the mind which has wrestled with its perplexity is at rest; the heart which has fought against its sorrow is, as it were, benumbed.

Jacques remained passive in his cell, until, having heard sounds in that occupied by Ascanio, which he supposed to be caused by the entrance of the jailer with his breakfast, he concluded that they would surely be left in peace for a few hours. He waited some little time after the noise had ceased, then crawled into his underground gallery, passed through it, and raised the mat with his head.

Ascanio's cell was plunged in most intense darkness.

Aubry called his friend's name in a low tone, but there was no reply. The cell was untenanted.

Aubry's first feeling was one of joy. Ascanio was free, and if Ascanio was free there was no need for him

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to — But almost immediately he remembered what was said the night before about providing him with better quarters. It was plain that the suggestion of Madame d'Etampes had been heeded, and the sounds he heard were caused by his friend's being moved.

Aubry's hope was as dazzling, therefore, but as evanescent, as a flash of lightning. He let the mat fall and crawled backward into his cell. Every source of consolation was taken from him, even the presence of the friend for whom he had sacrificed himself.

He had no resource left but reflection. But he had already reflected so long, and his reflections had led to such a disastrous result, that he preferred to sleep.

He threw himself upon his bed, and as he was very much in arrears in the matter of sleep, it was not long before he was entirely unconscious of his surroundings, notwithstanding the perturbed condition of his mind.

He dreamed that he was condemned to death and hanged; but through the deviltry of the hangman, the rope was badly greased, and his neck was not broken. He was buried in due form, none the less, and in his dream was beginning to gnaw his arms, as men buried alive always do, when the clerk, determined to have his bit of rope, came to secure it, opened the coffin in which he was immured, and restored his life and liberty.

Alas! it was only a dream, and when the student awoke his life was still in great danger, and his liberty altogether non-existent.

The evening, the night, and the next day passed away, and brought him no other visitor than his jailer. He tried to ask him a few questions, but could not extract a word from him.

In the middle of the second night, as Jacques was in the midst of his first sleep, he was awakened with a

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start by the grinding of his door upon its hinges. However soundly a prisoner may be sleeping, the sound of an opening door always awakens him.

The student sat up in bed.

"Up with you, and dress yourself," said the jailer's harsh voice; and Aubry could see by the light of the torch he held, the halberds of two of the provost's guards behind him.

The second branch of his order was unnecessary; as the student's bed was entirely unprovided with bedclothes, he had lain down completely dressed.

"Where do you propose to take me, pray?" demanded Jacques, still asleep with one eye.

"You are very inquisitive," said the jailer.

"But I would like to know."

"Come, come; no arguing, but follow me."

Resistance was useless, so the prisoner obeyed.

The jailer walked first, then came Aubry, and the two guards brought up the rear of the procession.

Jacques looked around with an inquietude which he did not seek to conceal. He feared a nocturnal execution; but one thing comforted him, he saw no priest or hangman.

After a few moments he found himself in the first room to which he was taken at the time of his coming to the prison; but instead of escorting him to the outer door, which he hoped for an instant that they would do, so prone to illusions does misfortune render one, his guide opened a door at one corner of the room and entered an inner corridor leading to a courtyard.

The prisoner's first thought on entering the courtyard, where he felt the fresh air and saw the starlit sky, was to fill his lungs, and lay in a stock of oxygen, not knowing when he might have another opportunity.

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The next moment he noticed the ogive windows of a fourteenth century chapel on the other side of the yard, and began to suspect what was in the wind.

The truth-telling instinct of the historian compels us to state that at the thought his strength wellnigh failed him.

However, the memory of Ascanio and Colombe, and the grandeur of the self-sacrifice about to be consummated, sustained him in his distress. He walked with a firm step toward the chapel, and when he stood in the doorway everything was explained.

The priest stood by the altar; in the choir a woman was waiting; the woman was Gervaise.

Half-way up the choir he met the governor of the Châtelet.

"You desired to make reparation, before your death, to the young woman whose honor you stole from her: your request was no more than just and it is granted."

A cloud passed over the student's eyes; but he put his hand over Madame d'Etampes's letter, and his courage returned.

"Oh, my poor Jacques!" cried Gervaise, throwing herself into the student's arms: "oh, who could have dreamed that this hour which I have so longed for would strike under such circumstances!"

"What wouldst thou have, my dear Gervaise?" cried the student, receiving her upon his breast. "God knows those whom he should punish and those whom he should reward: we must submit to God's will."

"Take this," he added beneath his breath, slipping Madame d'Etampes's letter into her hand; "for Benvenuto and for him alone!"

"What's that?" exclaimed the governor, walking hastily toward them; "what's the matter?"

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"Nothing; I was telling Gervaise how I love her."

"As she will not, in all probability, have time to ascertain the contrary, protestations are thrown away; go to the altar and make haste."

Aubry and Gervaise went forward in silence to the waiting priest. When they were in front of him they fell upon their knees and the mass began.

Jacques would have been very glad of an opportunity to exchange a few words with Gervaise, who, for her part, was burning up with the desire to express her gratitude to Aubry; but two guards stood beside them listening to every word and watching every movement. It was very fortunate that a momentary feeling of sympathy led the governor to allow them to exchange the embrace under cover of which the letter passed from Jacques's hands to Gervaise's. That opportunity lost, the close surveillance to which they were subjected would have rendered Jacques's devotion of no avail.

The priest had received his instructions, doubtless, for he cut his discourse very short. It may be, too, that he thought it would be trouble thrown away to enjoin due regard to his duties as a husband and father upon a man who was to be hanged within two or three days.

The discourse at an end, the benediction given, the mass said, Aubry and Gervaise thought they would be allowed to speak together privately for a moment, but not so. Despite the tears of Gervaise, who was literally dissolved in them, the guards forced them to part.

They had time, however, to exchange a glance. Aubry's said, "Remember my commission." Gervaise's replied, "Never fear; it shall be done to-night, or to-morrow at latest."

Then they were led away in opposite directions. Ger-

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vaise was politely escorted to the street door, and Jacques was politely taken back to his cell.

As the door closed upon him, he heaved a deeper sigh than any of those he had perpetrated since he entered the prison: he was married.

Thus it was that Aubry, like another Curtius, plunged headlong, through devotion, into the hymeneal gulf.

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XVIII.

THE CASTING.

Now, with our readers' permission, we will leave the Châtelet for a moment, and return to the Hôtel de Nesle.

The workmen responded quickly to Benvenuto's cries, and followed him to the foundry.

They all knew him as he appeared when at work; but never had they seen such an expression upon his face, never such a flame in his eyes. Whoever could have cast him in a mould at that moment, as he was on the point of casting his Jupiter, would have endowed the world with the noblest statue ever created by the genius of an artist.

Everything was ready: the wax model in its envelope of clay, girt round with iron bands, was awaiting in the furnace which surrounded it the hour of its life. The wood was all arranged: Benvenuto set fire to it in four different places, and as it was spruce, which the artist had been long collecting that it might be thoroughly dry, the fire quickly attacked every part of the furnace, and the mould was soon the centre of an immense blaze. The wax thereupon began to run out through the air-holes while the mould was baking: at the same time the workmen were digging a long ditch beside the furnace, into which the metal was to be poured in a state of fusion, for Benvenuto was anxious not to lose a moment, and

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to proceed to the casting as soon as the mould was thoroughly baked.

For a day and a half the wax trickled from the mould; for a day and a half, while the workmen divided into watches and took turn and turn about like the sailors on a man-of-war, Benvenuto was constantly on hand, hovering about the furnace, feeding the fire, encouraging the workmen. At last he found that the wax had all run out, and that the mould was thoroughly baked; this completed the second part of his work; the last part was the melting of the bronze and the casting of the statue. When that stage was reached the workmen, who were utterly unable to comprehend such superhuman strength and such an intensity of passion, endeavored to induce Benvenuto to take a few hours' rest; but that would mean so many hours added to Ascanio's captivity and the persecution of Colombe. Benvenuto refused. He seemed to be made of the same bronze of which he was about to make a god.

When the ditch was dug, he wound stout ropes about the mould, and with the aid of windlasses prepared for that purpose, he raised it with every possible precaution, swung it out over the ditch, and let it down slowly until it was on a level with the furnace. He fixed it firmly in place there by piling around it the dirt taken from the ditch, treading it down, and putting in place, as the dirt rose about the mould, the pieces of earthen pipe which were to serve as air-holes. All these preparations took the rest of the day. Night came. For forty-eight hours Benvenuto had not slept nor lain down, nor even sat down. The workmen implored, Scozzone scolded, but Benvenuto would hear none of it: he seemed to be sustained by some more than human power, and made no other reply to the entreaties and scolding than to assign

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to each workman his task, in the short, stern tone of an officer manœuvring his troops.

Benvenuto was determined to begin the casting at once: the energetic artist, who was accustomed to see all obstacles yield before him, exerted his imperious power upon himself; he ordered his body to act, and it obeyed, while his companions were obliged to withdraw, one after another, as in battle wounded soldiers leave the field and seek the hospital.

The casting furnace was ready: it was filled with round ingots of brass and copper, symmetrically piled one upon another, so that the heat could pass between them, and the fusion be effected more quickly and more completely. He set fire to the wood around it as in the case of the other furnace, and as it was mostly spruce, the resin which exuded from it, in conjunction with the combustible nature of the wood, soon made such a fierce flame that it rose higher than was anticipated, and lapped the roof of the foundry, which took fire at once, being of wood. At the sight of this conflagration, and more especially at the heat which it gave forth, all the artist's comrades, save Hermann, drew back; but Hermann and Benvenuto were a host in themselves. Each of them seized an axe and cut away at the wooden pillars which upheld the roof, and in an instant it fell in. Thereupon Hermann and Benvenuto with poles pushed the burning fragments into the furnace, and with the increased heat the metal began to melt.

But Benvenuto had at last reached the limit of his strength. For nearly sixty hours he had not slept, for twenty-four he had not eaten, and during the whole of that time he was the soul of the whole performance, the axis upon which the whole operation turned. A terrible fever took possession of him: a deathly pallor succeeded

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to his usual high color. In an atmosphere so intensely hot that no one could live beside him, he felt his limbs tremble and his teeth chatter as if he were amid the snows of Lapland. His companions remarked his condition and drew near to him. He tried to resist, to deny that he was beaten, for in his eyes it was a disgrace to yield even before the impossible; but at last he was fain to confess that his strength was failing him. Fortunately, the fusion was nearly accomplished: the most difficult part of the operation was past, and what remained to be done was mere mechanical work. He called Pagolo; Pagolo did not reply. But the workmen shouted his name in chorus and he at last appeared; he said that he had been praying for the successful issue of the casting.

"This is no time to pray!" cried Benvenuto, "and the Lord said, 'He who works prays.' This is the time for work, Pagolo. Hark ye: I feel that I am dying; but whether I die or not, my Jupiter must live. Pagolo, my friend, to thee I intrust the management of the casting, sure that thou canst do it as well as I, if thou wilt. Understand, Pagolo, the metal will soon be ready; thou canst not mistake the proper degree of heat. When it is red thou wilt give a sledge hammer to Hermann, and one to Simon-le-Gaucher. — My God! what was I saying? Ah, yes! — Then they must knock out the two plugs of the furnace; the metal will flow out, and if I am dead you will tell the king that he promised me a boon, and that you claim it in my name, and that it — is — O my God! I no longer remember. What was I to ask the king? Ah, yes! — Ascanio — Seigneur de Nesle — Colombe, the provost's daughter — D'Orbec — Madame d'Etampes — Ah! I am going mad!"

Benvenuto staggered and fell into Hermann's arms,

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who carried him off like a child to his room, while Pagolo, intrusted with the superintendence of the work, gave orders for it to go on.

Benvenuto was right: he was going mad, or rather a terrible delirium had taken possession of him. Scozzone, who doubtless had been praying as Pagolo had, hurried to his side; but Benvenuto continued to cry, "I am dying! I am dying! Ascanio! Ascanio! what will become of Ascanio?"

A thousand delirious visions were crowding in upon his brain: Ascanio, Colombe, Stefana, all appeared and disappeared like ghosts. In the throng which passed before his eyes was Pompeo the goldsmith, whom he slew with his dagger; and the keeper of the post-house at Sienna, whom he slew with his arquebus. Past and present were confounded in his brain. Now it was Clement VII. who detained Ascanio in prison; again it was Cosmo I. who sought to force Colombe to marry D'Orbec. Then he would appeal to Queen Eleanora, thinking he was addressing Madame d'Etampes, and would implore and threaten her by turns. Then he would make sport of poor weeping Scozzone, and bid her beware lest Pagolo should break his neck clambering around on the cornices like a cat. Intervals of complete prostration would succeed these paroxysms, and it would seem as if he were at the point of death.

This agonizing state of affairs endured three hours. Benvenuto was in one of his periods of torpor when Pagolo suddenly rushed into the room, pale and agitated, crying: —

"May Jesus and the Virgin help us, master! for all is lost now, and we can look nowhere but to Heaven for help."

Worn out, half conscious, dying as he was, these

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words, like a sharp stiletto, reached the very bottom of his heart. The veil which clouded his intellect was torn away, and, like Lazarus rising at the voice of the Lord, he rose upon his bed, crying: —

"Who dares to say that all is lost when Benvenuto still lives?"

"Alas! I, master," said Pagolo.

"Double traitor!" cried Benvenuto, "is it written that thou shalt forever prove false to me? But never fear! Jesus and the Virgin whom you invoked just now are at hand, to bear aid to men of good will, and punish traitors!"

At that moment he heard the workmen lamenting and crying: —

"Benvenuto! Benvenuto!"

"He is here! he is here!" cried the artist, rushing from his room, pale of face, but with renewed strength and clearness of vision. "Here he is! and woe to them who have not done their duty!"

In two bounds Benvenuto was at the foundry; he found all the workmen, whom he had left so full of vigor and enthusiasm, in a state of utter stupefaction and dejection. Even Hermann the colossus seemed to be dying of fatigue; he was tottering on his legs and was compelled to lean against one of the supports of the roof which remained standing.

"Now listen to what I say," cried Benvenuto in an awful voice, falling into their midst like a thunderbolt. "I don't as yet know what has happened, but I swear to you beforehand that it can be remedied, whatever it may be, — upon my soul it can! Now that I am present, obey me on your lives! but obey passively, without a word, without a gesture, for the first man who hesitates I will kill.

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"So much for the ill disposed.

"I have but one word to say to those who are disposed to do their duty: the liberty and happiness of Ascanio, your companion of whom you are all so fond, will follow the successful issue of this task. To work!"

With that Cellini approached the furnace to form his own opinion of what had taken place. The supply of wood had given out, and the metal had cooled, so that it had turned to cake, as the professional phrase goes.

Benvenuto at once determined that the disaster could be repaired. Pagolo's watchfulness had relaxed in all likelihood, and he had allowed the heat of the fire to abate: the thing to be done was to make the fire as hot as ever, and to reduce the metal to a liquid state once more.

"Wood!" cried Benvenuto, "wood! Go look for wood wherever it can possibly be found; go to the bakers, and buy it by the pound if necessary; bring every stick of wood that there is in the house to the smallest chip. Break in the doors of the Petit-Nesle, Hermann, if Dame Perrine does n't choose to open them; everything in that direction is lawful prize, for it 's an enemy's country. Wood! wood!"

To set the example Benvenuto seized an axe and attacked the two posts which were still standing: they soon fell with the last remnants of the roof, and Benvenuto at once pushed the whole mass into the fire: at the same time his comrades returned from all directions laden with wood.

"Ah!" cried Benvenuto, "now are you ready to obey me?"

"Yes! yes!" cried every voice, "yes! we will do whatever you bid us do, so long as we have a breath of life in our bodies."

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"Select the oak then, and throw on nothing but oak at first: that burns more quickly, and consequently will repair the damage sooner."

Immediately oak began to rain down upon the fire, and Benvenuto was obliged to cry enough.

His energy infected all his comrades; his orders, even his gestures, were understood and executed on the instant. Pagolo alone muttered from time to time between his teeth: —

"You are trying to perform impossibilities, master: it is tempting Providence."

To which Cellini's only reply was a look which seemed to say, "Never fear; we have an account to settle hereafter."

Meanwhile, notwithstanding Pagolo's sinister predictions, the metal began to fuse anew, and to hasten the fusion Benvenuto at intervals threw a quantity of lead into the furnace, stirring up the lead and copper and brass with a long bar of iron, so that, to borrow his expression, the metal corpse began to come to life again. At sight of the progress that was making, Benvenuto was so elate that he was unconscious of fever or weakness; he too came to life once more.

At last the metal began to boil and seethe. Benvenuto at once opened the orifice of the mould and ordered the plugs of the furnace to be knocked out, which was done on the instant; but, as if this immense work was to be a veritable combat of Titans to the end, Benvenuto perceived, as soon as the plugs were removed, not only that the metal did not run freely enough, but that there was some question as to whether there was enough of it. Thereupon, with one of those heaven-sent inspirations which come to none but artists, he cried: —

"Let half of you remain here to feed the fire, and the rest follow me!"

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With that he rushed into the house, followed by five of his men, and an instant later they all reappeared, laden with silver plate, pewter, bullion, and pieces of work half completed. Benvenuto himself set the example, and each one cast his precious burden into the furnace, which instantly devoured everything, bronze, lead, silver, rough pig-metal, and beautiful works of art, with the same indifference with which it would have devoured the artist himself if he had thrown himself in.

Thanks to this reinforcement of fusible matter, the metal became thoroughly liquefied, and, as if it repented of its momentary hesitation, began to flow freely. There ensued a period of breathless suspense, which became something very like terror when Benvenuto perceived that all of the bronze did not reach the orifice of the mould: he sounded with a long rod and found that the mould was entirely filled without exhausting the supply of metal.

Thereupon he fell upon his knees and thanked God: the work was finished which was to save Ascanio and Colombe: now would God permit that the result should fulfil his hopes?

It was impossible to know until the following day.

The night that followed was, as can readily be imagined, a night of agony, and, worn out as Benvenuto was, he slept for a very few moments only, and his sleep even for those few moments was far from being restful. His eyes were hardly closed before real objects gave place to imaginary ones. He saw his Jupiter, the king of the gods in beauty as well as power, as shapeless and deformed as his son Vulcan. In his dream he was unable to understand this catastrophe. Was it the fault of the mould? Was it the fault of the casting? Had he made a miscalculation? or was destiny making sport

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of him? At the sight his temples throbbed furiously, and he awoke with his heart jumping, and bathed in perspiration. For some time his mind was so confused that he could not separate fact from vision. At last, however, he remembered that his Jupiter was still hidden in the mould, like a child in its mother's womb. He recalled all the precautions he had taken. He implored God not only to make his work successful, but to do a merciful deed. Thereupon he became somewhat calmer, and fell asleep again — under the weight of the never-ending weariness which seemed to have laid hold on him forever — only to fall into a second dream as absurd and as terrifying as the first.

Day broke at last, and with its coming Benvenuto shook himself clear of all symptoms of drowsiness: in an instant he was on his feet and fully dressed, and hastened at once to the foundry.

The bronze was evidently still too hot to be exposed to the air, but Benvenuto was in such haste to ascertain what he had still to fear, or what he might hope, that he could not contain himself, and began to uncover the head. When he put his hand to the mould he was so pale that one would have thought him at the point of death.

"Are you still sick, master?" inquired a voice, which he recognized as Hermann's; "you vould do much petter to stay in your ped."

"You are wrong, Hermann, my boy," said Benvenuto, amazed to find him astir so early, "for I should die in my bed. But how happens it that you are out of bed at this hour?"

"I vas taking a valk," said Hermann, blushing to the whites of his eyes; "I like much to valk. Shall I help you, master?"

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"No, no!" cried Benvenuto; "no one but myself is to touch the mould! Wait, wait!"

And he began gently to uncover the head. By a miraculous chance there was just the necessary amount of metal. If it had not occurred to him to throw all his silver plate and other objects into the furnace, the head would have been missing and the casting a failure.

Fortunately the head was not missing, and was wonderfully beautiful.

The sight of it encouraged Benvenuto to expose the other portions of the body one after another. Little by little the mould fell away like bark, and at last Jupiter, freed from head to foot from his trammels, appeared in all the majesty befitting the sovereign of Olympus. In no part of the work had the bronze betrayed the artist, and when the last morsel of clay fell away, all the workmen joined in a shout of admiration; for they had come out one by one and gathered about Cellini, who did not even notice their presence, so absorbed was he by the thoughts to which this complete success gave rise.

But at the shout, which made him too a god, he raised his head, and said with a proud smile: —

"We shall see if the King of France will refuse the first boon asked by the man who has made such a statue!"

The next instant, as if he repented his first impulse of pride, which was entirely characteristic of him, he fell upon his knees, and with clasped hands rendered thanks to the Lord aloud.

As he was finishing his prayer Scozzone ran out to say that *Madame* Jacques Aubry desired to speak to him in private, having a letter from her husband, which she could hand to none but Benvenuto.

Benvenuto made Scozzone repeat the name twice, for

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he had no idea that the student was in the hands of a lawful wife.

He obeyed the summons none the less, leaving his companions swollen with pride in their master's renown. Pagolo meanwhile, on scrutinizing the statue more closely, observed that there was an imperfection in the heel, some accident having prevented the metal from filling every part of the mould.

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XIX.

JUPITER AND OLYMPUS.

On the same day that Benvenuto removed his statue from the mould, he sent word to François I. that his Jupiter was cast, and asked him on what day it was his pleasure that the King of Olympus should appear before the King of France.

François replied that his cousin, the Emperor, and he were to hunt in the forest of Fontainebleau on the following Thursday, and that he need do nothing more than have his statue transported to the grand gallery of the château on that day.

The reply was very short; it was evident that Madame d'Etampes had strongly prejudiced the king against his favorite artist. But Benvenuto — was it through pride or confidence in God? — said simply, with a smile, —

"It is well."

It was Monday. Benvenuto caused the Jupiter to be loaded upon a wagon, and rode beside it, not leaving it for an instant, lest some mishap might befall it. On Thursday, at ten o'clock, statue and artist were at Fontainebleau.

To any one who saw Benvenuto, though it were only to see him ride by, it was evident that pride and radiant hope were triumphant in his heart. His conscience as an artist told him that he had executed a *chef-d'œuvre*, and his honest heart that he was about to perform a

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meritorious action. He was doubly joyous, therefore, and carried his head high, like a man who, having no hatred in his heart, was equally without fear. The king was to see his Jupiter, and could not fail to be pleased with it; Montmorency and Poyet would remind him of his promise; the Emperor and the whole court would be present, and François could not do otherwise than as he had given his word to do.

Madame d'Etampes, with less innocent delight, but with quite as much ardent passion, was maturing her plans. She had triumphed over Benvenuto at the time of his first attempt to confound her by presenting himself at her own hôtel and at the Louvre. The first danger was safely past, but she felt that the king's promise to Benvenuto was a second equally great danger, and it was her purpose, at any cost, to induce his Majesty to disregard it. She therefore repaired to Fontainebleau one day in advance of Cellini, and laid her wires with the profound feminine craft which in her case almost amounted to genius.

Cellini was destined very soon to feel its effects.

He had no sooner crossed the threshold of the gallery where his Jupiter was to be exhibited, than he felt the blow, recognized the hand that had dealt it, and stood for a moment overwhelmed.

This gallery, ordinarily resplendent with paintings by Rosso, which were in themselves enough to distract the attention from almost any masterpiece, had been embellished during the last three days by statues sent from Rome by Primaticcio, — that is to say, the marvels of antique sculpture, the types sanctified by the admiration of twenty centuries, were there before him, challenging comparison, crushing all rivalry. Ariadne, Venus, Hercules, Apollo, even Jupiter himself, the

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great Olympian Jove, — ideal figures, dreams of genius, eternities in bronze, — formed, as it were, a supernatural assemblage which it was impious to approach, a sublime tribunal whose judgment every artist should dread.

There was something like profanation and blasphemy in the thought of another Jupiter insinuating himself into that Olympus, of Benvenuto throwing down the gauntlet to Phidias, and, notwithstanding his trust in his own merit, the devout artist recoiled.

Furthermore, the immortal statues had taken posses sion of all the best places, as it was their right to do, and there was no place left for Cellini's poor Jupiter but some dark corner which could only be reached by passing under the stately and imposing glances of the ancient gods.

Benvenuto stood in the doorway with bowed head, and with an expression in which sadness and artistic gratification were mingled.

"Messire Antoine Le Maçon," he said to the king's secretary, who stood beside him, "I ought to and will send my Jupiter back instantly; the disciple will not attempt to contend with the masters; the child will not attempt to contend with his parents; my pride and my modesty alike forbid."

"Benvenuto," replied the secretary, "take the advice of a sincere friend, — if you do that, you are lost. I tell you this between ourselves, that your enemies hope to discourage you, and then to allege your discouragement as a proof of your lack of skill. It will be useless for me to make excuses for you to the king. His Majesty, who is impatient to see your work, would refuse to listen, and, with Madame d'Etampes continually urging him to do it, would withdraw his favor from you forever. She anticipates that result, and I fear it. It 's

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with the living, not with the dead, Benvenuto, that you have to contend."

"You are right, messire," the goldsmith rejoined, "and I understand you perfectly. Thank you for reminding me that I have no right to have any self-esteem here."

"That's all right, Benvenuto. But let me give you one more bit of advice. Madame d'Etampes is too fascinating to-day not to have some perfidious scheme in her head: she took the king and the Emperor off for a ride in the forest with irresistible playfulness and charm; I am afraid for your sake that she will find a way to keep them there until dark."

"Do you think it?" cried Benvenuto, turning pale. "Why, if she succeeds in doing that, I am lost; for my statue would then have to be exhibited by artificial light, which would deprive it of half its merit."

"Let us hope that I am mistaken," said Le Maçon, "and see what comes to pass."

Cellini waited in painful suspense. He placed his Jupiter in as favorable a light as possible, but he did not conceal from himself the fact that its effect would be comparatively slight by twilight, and that after nightfall it would be positively bad. The duchess's hatred had reckoned no less accurately than the artist's skill; she anticipated in 1541 a trick of the critics of the nineteenth century.

Benvenuto watched the sun sink toward the horizon with despair at his heart, and listened eagerly to every sound without the château. Except for the servants the vast structure was deserted.

Three o'clock struck; thenceforth the purpose of Madame d'Etampes could not be mistaken, and her success was beyond question. Benvenuto fell upon a

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chair, utterly crushed. All was lost: his renown first of all. That feverish struggle, in which he had been so near succumbing, and which he had already forgotten because he had thought that it made his triumph sure, would have no other result than to put him to shame. He gazed sorrowfully at his statue, around which the shadows of night were already beginning to fall, and whose lines began to appear less pure.

Suddenly an inspiration came to him; he sprang to his feet, called little Jehan, whom he had brought with him, and rushed hastily from the gallery. Nothing had yet occurred to suggest the king's return. Benvenuto hurried to a cabinet-maker in the town, and with his assistance and that of his workmen made, in less than an hour, a stand of light-colored oak, with four rollers, which turned in every direction, like casters.

He trembled now lest the king should return too soon: but at five o'clock the work was completed, night had fallen, and the crowned heads had not returned to the château. Madame d'Etampes, wherever she was, was in a fair way to triumph.

In a very short time Benvenuto had the statue in place upon the almost invisible stand. Jupiter held in his left hand the sphere representing the world, and in his right, a little above his head, the thunderbolt, which he seemed to be on the point of launching into space: amid the tongues of the thunderbolt the goldsmith concealed a lamp.

These preparations were hardly completed when a flourish of trumpets announced the return of the king and the Emperor. Benvenuto lighted the lamp, stationed little Jehan behind the statue, by which he was entirely concealed, and awaited the king's coming, not without trepidation, evidenced by the violent beating of his heart.

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Ten minutes later the folding-doors were thrown wide open, and François I. appeared, leading Charles V. by the hand.

The Dauphin, Dauphine, the King of Navarre, and the whole court followed the two monarchs; the provost, his daughter, and D'Orbec were among the last. Colombe was pale and dejected, but as soon as she espied Cellini, she raised her head, and a smile of sublime confidence appeared upon her lips and lighted up her face.

Cellini met her glance with one which seemed to say, "Have no fear; whatever happens, do not despair, for I am watching over you."

As the door opened, little Jehan, at a signal from his master, gave the statue a slight push, so that it moved softly forward upon its smoothly rolling stand, and, leaving the antique statues behind, went to meet the king, so to speak, as if it were alive. Every eye was at once turned in its direction. The soft light of the lamp falling from above produced an effect much more agreeable than daylight.

Madame d'Etampes bit her lips.

"Methinks, Sire," said she, "that the flattery is a little overdone, and that it was for the king of earth to go to meet the king of heaven."

The king smiled, but it was easy to see that the flattery did not offend him; as his wont was, he forgot the artist for his art, saved the statue half the journey by walking to meet it, and examined it for a long time in silence. Charles V., who was by nature an astute politician rather than a great artist, although he did one day, in a moment of good humor, pick up Titian's pencil, — Charles V. and the courtiers, who were not entitled to an opinion, waited respectfully to hear that of François before pronouncing their own.

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There was a moment of silent suspense, during which Benvenuto and the duchess exchanged a glance of bitter hatred.

Suddenly the king cried, —

"It is beautiful! it is very beautiful! and I confess that my expectations are surpassed."

Thereupon every one overflowed in compliments and extravagant praise, the Emperor first of all.

"If one could conquer artists like cities," said he to the king, "I would declare war on you instantly, to win this one, my cousin."

"But, after all," interrupted Madame d'Etampes, in a rage, "we do not even look at the beautiful antique statues a little farther on, which have somewhat more merit, perhaps, than our modern gewgaws."

The king thereupon walked toward the antique statues, which were lighted from below by the torches, so that the upper portions were in shadow; they were beyond question much less effective than the Jupiter.

"Phidias is sublime," said the king, "but there may be a Phidias in the age of François I. and Charles V., as there was in the age of Pericles."

"Oh, we must see it by daylight," said Anne, bitterly; "to appear to be is not to be: an artificial light is not art. And what is that veil? is it to conceal some defect, Master Cellini, tell us frankly?"

She referred to a very light drapery thrown over the statue to give it more majesty.

Thus far Benvenuto had remained beside his statue, silent, and apparently as cold as it; but at the duchess's words, he smiled disdainfully, shot lightning from his black eyes, and, with the sublime audacity of a heathen artist, snatched the veil away with his powerful hand.

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He expected that the duchess would burst forth with renewed fury.

But by an incredible exertion of her will power, she smiled with ominous affability, and graciously held out her hand to Cellini, who was amazed beyond measure by this sudden change of tactics.

"I was wrong," she said aloud, in the tone of a spoiled child; "you are a great sculptor, Cellini; forgive my critical remarks; give me your hand, and let us be friends henceforth. What say you?"

She added in an undertone, with extreme volubility: "Think well of what you are about to ask, Cellini. Let it not be the marriage of Colombe and Ascanio, or I swear that Colombe, Ascanio, and yourself, all three, are undone forever!"

"And suppose I request something else, madame," said Benvenuto, in the same tone; "will you second my request?"

"Yes," said she, eagerly; "and I swear that, whatever it may be, the king will grant it."

"I have no need to request the king's sanction to the marriage of Colombe and Ascanio, for you will request it yourself, madame."

The duchess smiled disdainfully.

"What are you whispering there?" said François.

"Madame la Duchesse d'Etampes," Benvenuto replied, "was obliging enough to remind me that your Majesty had promised to grant me a boon in case you were content with my work."

"And the promise was made in my presence, Sire," said the constable, coming forward; "in my presence and Chancelier Poyet's. Indeed, you bade my colleague and myself remind you —"

"True, constable," interposed the king, good-

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humoredly; "true, if I failed to remember myself; but I remember famously, on my word! So your intervention, while it is perfectly agreeable to me, is quite useless. I promised Benvenuto to grant whatever boon he might ask when his Jupiter was cast. Was not that it, constable? Have I a good memory, chancellor? It is for you to speak, Master Cellini: I am at your service; but I beg you to think less of your own merit, which is immense, than of our power, which is limited; we make no reservations, saving our crown and our mistress."

"Very good, Sire," said Cellini," since your Majesty is so well disposed toward your unworthy servitor, I will ask for the pardon of a poor student, who fell into a dispute upon the Quai du Châtelet with the Vicomte de Marmagne, and in self-defence passed his sword through the viscount's body."

Every one marvelled at the moderation of his request, and Madame d'Etampes most of all; she gazed at Benvenuto with an air of stupefaction, and as if she thought that she could not have heard aright.

"By Mahomet's belly!" exclaimed François, "you do well to invoke my right of pardon in that matter, for I heard the chancellor himself say yesterday that it was a hanging affair."

"Oh, Sire!" cried the duchess, "I intended to speak to you myself concerning that young man. I have had news of Marmagne, who is improving, and who sent word to me that he sought the quarrel, and the student — What is the student's name, Master Benvenuto?"

"Jacques Aubry, Madame la Duchesse."

"And the student," continued Madame d'Etampes, hurriedly, "was in no wise in the wrong; and so, Sire, instead of rebuking Benvenuto, or cavilling at him, grant

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his request promptly, lest he repent of having been of modest."

"Very well," said François; "what you desire shall be done, master; and as he gives twice who gives quickly, — so says the proverb, — let the order to set this young man at liberty be despatched to-night. Do you hear, my dear chancellor?"

"Yes, Sire; and your Majesty shall be obeyed."

"As to yourself, Master Benvenuto," said François, "come to me on Monday at the Louvre, and we will adjust certain matters of detail in which you are interested, and which have been somewhat neglected of late by my treasurer."

"But your Majesty knows that admission to the Louvre — "

"Very good! very good! the person who gave the order can rescind it. It was a war measure, and as you now have none but friends at court, everything will be re-established upon a peace footing."

"As your Majesty is in a granting mood," said the duchess, "I pray you to grant a trifling request which I prefer, although I did not make the Jupiter."

"No," said Benvenuto in an undertone, "but you have often acted the part of Danaë."

"What is your request?" said François, who did not hear Benvenuto's epigram. "Say on, Madame la Duchesse, and be sure that the solemnity of the occasion can add nothing to my desire to be agreeable to you."

"Very well, Sire; your Majesty might well confer upon Messire d'Estourville the great honor of signing on Monday next the marriage contract of my young friend, Mademoiselle d'Estourville, with Comte d'Orbec."

"Why, I should be conferring no favor upon you by so doing," rejoined the king, "but I should afford my-

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self a very great pleasure, and should still remain your debtor, I swear."

"So it is agreed, Sire, for Monday?" asked the duchess.

"For Monday," said the king.

"Madame la Duchesse," said Benvenuto, under his breath, "do you not regret that the beautiful lily you ordered Ascanio to execute is not finished, that you might wear it upon such an occasion?"

"Of course I regret it," was the reply; "but it's impossible, for Ascanio is in prison."

"Very true, but I am free; I will finish it and bring it to Madame la Duchesse."

"Oh! upon my honor! if you do that I will say —"

"You will say what, madame?"

"I will say that you are a delightful man."

She gave her hand to Benvenuto, who gallantly imprinted a kiss upon it, after asking the king's permission with a glance.

At that moment a slight shriek was heard.

"What is that?" the king asked.

"Sire, I ask your Majesty's pardon," said the provost, "but my daughter is ill."

"Poor child!" murmured Benvenuto; "she thinks that I have abandoned her."

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XX.

A PRUDENT MARRIAGE.

Benvenuto would have returned to Paris the same evening, but the king was so persistent that he could not avoid remaining at the château until the following morning.

With the rapidity of conception and promptness of decision which were characteristic of him, he determined to arrange for the next day the *dénouement* of a transaction which he began long before. It was a collateral matter which he wished to have off his hands altogether before devoting himself entirely to Ascanio and Colombe.

He remained at the château to supper on that evening and until after breakfast on the Friday, and not until noon did he set out on his return journey, accompanied by little Jehan, after taking leave of the king and Madame d'Etampes.

Both were well mounted, and yet, contrary to his wont, Cellini did not urge his horse. It was evident that he did not wish to enter Paris before a certain hour, and it was seven o'clock in the evening when he alighted at Rue de la Harpe.

Furthermore, instead of betaking himself at once to the Hôtel de Nesle, he called upon one of his friends named Guido, a physician from Florence; and when he had made sure that his friend was at home, and could conveniently entertain him at supper, he ordered little

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Jehan to return alone, to say that he had remained at Fontainebleau and would not return until the next day, and to be ready to open the door when he should knock. Little Jehan at once set out for the Hôtel de Nesle, promising to abide by his instructions.

The supper was served, — but before they took their places at the table Cellini asked his host if he did not know some honest and skilful notary whom he could send for to prepare a contract that could not be assailed. He recommended his son in law, who was immediately summoned.

He arrived as they were finishing their supper, some half-hour later. Benvenuto at once left the table, closeted himself with him, and bade him draw up a marriage contract leaving the names in blank. When they had read and re-read the contract, as drawn up, to make sure that there was no flaw in it, Benvenuto paid him handsomely, put the contract in his pocket, borrowed from his friend a second sword of just the length of his own, put it under his cloak, and, as it had become quite dark, started for the Hôtel de Nesle.

When he reached his destination, he knocked once; but though he knocked very gently, the door immediately opened. Little Jehan was at his post.

Cellini questioned him: the workmen were at supper and did not expect him until the morrow. He bade the child maintain the most absolute silence as to his arrival, then crept up to Catherine's room, to which he had retained a key, entered softly, closed the door, concealed himself behind the hangings, and waited.

After a short time, he heard a light footstep on the staircase. The door opened a second time, and Scozzone entered, lamp in hand; she took the key from the outside, locked the door, placed the lamp on the chimney-

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piece, and sat down in a large arm-chair, so placed that Benvenuto could see her face.

To his vast astonishment, that face, formerly so open and joyous and animated, was sad and thoughtful. The fact was that poor Scozzone was in the throes of something very like remorse.

We have seen her when she was happy and thoughtless: then Benvenuto loved her. So long as she was conscious of that love, or rather of that kindly feeling in her lover's heart, so long as the hope of becoming the sculptor's wife some day was present like a golden cloud in all her dreams, so long she maintained herself at the level of her anticipations, and made atonement for her past by her love. But as soon as she discovered that she had been deceived by appearances, and that what she had mistaken for passion on Cellini's part was at most a mere whim, she descended the ladder of hope round by round. Benvenuto's smile, which had made that faded heart blossom anew, was taken from her, and the heart lost its freshness once more.

With her childish light-heartedness her childish purity had gradually vanished; her old nature, powerfully assisted by ennui, gently recovered the upper hand. A newly painted wall keeps its colors in the sun and loses them in the rain: Scozzone, abandoned by Cellini for some unknown mistress, was no longer held to him save by a remnant of her pride. Pagolo had long paid court to her: she spoke to Cellini of his love, thinking that his jealousy would be aroused. Her expectation was not realized: Cellini, instead of losing his temper, began to laugh, and, instead of forbidding her to see Pagolo, actually ordered her to receive him. Thereafter she felt that she was entirely lost; thereafter she abandoned her life to chance with her former indifference,

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and let it blow about in the wind of circumstances like a poor, fallen withered leaf.

Then it was that Pagolo triumphed over her indifference. After all was said, Pagolo was young; Pagolo, aside from his hypocritical expression, was a handsome youth; Pagolo was in love, and was forever repeating to her that he loved her, while Benvenuto had long since ceased to tell her so. The words, "I love you," are the language of the heart, and the heart always feels the need of speaking that language more or less ardently with some one.

Thus, in a moment of idleness, of anger, perhaps of illusion, Scozzone had told Pagolo that she loved him; she had told him so without really loving him; she had told him so with Cellini's image in her heart and his name upon her lips.

Then it immediately occurred to her that the day might come when Cellini, weary of his mysterious, unavailing passion, would return to her, and, if he found her constant, notwithstanding his express orders, would reward her devotion, not by marriage, for the poor girl had lost her last illusion in that regard, but by some remnant of esteem and compassion which she might take for a resurrection of his former love.

It was such thoughts as these which made Scozzone sad and thoughtful, and caused her to feel remorse.

In the midst of her silent reverie, she started and raised her head. She heard a light step on the stairway, and the next moment a key was rapidly turned in the lock, and the door opened.

"How did you come in? Who gave you that key, Pagolo?" she cried, rising from her chair. "There are only two keys to that door, — one is in my possession and the other in Cellini's."

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"Ah! my dear Catherine," laughed Pagolo, "you 're a capricious creature: sometimes you open your door to a fellow, and again you keep it closed; and when one attempts to enter by force, even though you have given him a right to do it, you threaten to call for help. So you see I had to resort to stratagem."

"Oh yes! tell me that you stole the key from Cellini, without his knowledge; tell me that he does n't know you have it, for if he gave it to you I should die of shame and chagrin."

"Set your mind at rest, my lovely Catherine," said Pagolo, locking the door, and sitting down near the girl, whom he forced to a seat beside him. "No, Benvenuto does n't love you, it is true: but he 's like those misers who have a treasure of which they make no use themselves, but which they won't allow anybody else to touch. No, I made the key myself. He who can do great things can do small things. Tell me if I love you, Catherine, when my hands, which are accustomed to making pearls and diamonds bloom on golden stalks, consented to shape an ignoble piece of iron. It is true, wicked one, that the ignoble piece of iron was a key, and that the key unlocked the door of paradise."

With that, Pagolo would have taken Catherine's hand, but, to the vast amazement of Cellini, who did not lose a word or a gesture of this scene, Catherine repulsed him.

"Well, well," said Pagolo, "is this whim likely to last long, pray?"

"Look you, Pagolo," said Catherine, in a melancholy tone, which went to Cellini's heart; "I know that when a woman has once yielded she has no right to draw back afterward; but if the man for whom she has been so weak has a generous heart, — when she says to him that

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she was acting in good faith at the time, because she had lost her reason, but that she was mistaken, — it is that man's duty, believe me, not to take an unfair advantage of her momentary error. Well, Pagolo, I tell you this: I yielded to you, and yet I did not love you; I loved another, and that other Cellini. Despise me you may, — indeed you ought, — but torment me no more, Pagolo."

"Good!" exclaimed Pagolo, "good! you arrange the matter marvellously well, upon my word! After the time you compelled me to wait for the favor with which you now reproach me, you think that I will release you from a definite engagement which you entered into of your own free will? No, no! And when I think that you are doing all this for Benvenuto, for a man who is twice your age or mine, for a man who does n't love you, for a man who despises you, for a man who treats you as a courtesan!"

"Stop, Pagolo, stop!" cried Scozzone, blushing with shame and jealousy and rage. "Benvenuto does n't love me any more, that is true; but he did love me once, and he esteems me still."

"Very good! Why does n't he marry you, as he promised to do?"

"Promised? Never. No, Benvenuto never promised to make me his wife; for if he had promised, he would have done it. I aspired to mount so high as that: the aspiration led me to hope that it might be so; and when the hope had once taken shape in my heart, I could not confine it there, it overflowed, and I boasted of a mere hope as if it were a reality. No, Pagolo, no," continued Catherine, letting her hand fall into the apprentice's with a sad smile, — "no, Benvenuto never promised me aught."

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"Then, see how ungrateful you are, Scozzone!" cried Pagolo, seizing her hand, and mistaking what was simply a mark of dejection for a return to him; "you repulse me, who have promised you and offered you all that Benvenuto, by your own admission, never promised or offered you, while I am convinced that if he were standing there — he who betrayed you — you would freely make to him the confession you so bitterly regret having made to me, who love you so dearly."

"Oh if he were here!" cried Scozzone, "if he were here, Pagolo, you would remember that you betrayed him through hatred, while I betrayed him because I loved him, and you would sink into the ground!"

"Why so?" demanded Pagolo, bold as a lion because he believed Benvenuto to be far away; "why so, if you please? Has n't every man the right to win a woman's love when that woman does n't belong to another? If he were here, I would say to him: 'You abandoned Catherine, — poor Catherine, who loved you so well. She was in despair at first, until she fell in with a kind-hearted, worthy fellow, who appreciated her at her true worth, who loved her, and who promised her what you would never promise her, — to make her his wife. He has inherited your rights, and that woman belongs to him.' Tell me, Catherine, what reply your Cellini could make to that?"

"None at all," said a stern, manly voice behind the enthusiastic Pagolo, — "absolutely none at all."

At the same instant a powerful hand fell upon his shoulder, nipped his eloquence in the bud, and threw him to the floor, as pale and terrified as he had been boastful and rash a moment before.

It was a strange picture: Pagolo on his knees, bent double, with colorless cheeks, and deadly terror depicted

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on his features; Scozzone, half risen from her chair, motionless and dumfounded, like a statue of Astonishment; and lastly, Benvenuto standing with folded arms, a sword in its sheath in one hand, a naked sword in the other, with an expression in which irony and menace struggled for the mastery.

There was a moment of awful silence, Pagolo and Scozzone being equally abashed beneath the master's frown.

"Treachery!" muttered Pagolo, "treachery!"

"Yes, treachery on your part, wretch!" retorted Cellini.

"You asked to see him, Pagolo," said Scozzone; "here he is."

"Yes, here he is," said the apprentice, ashamed to be thus treated before the woman he was so anxious to please; "but he is armed, and I have no weapon."

"I have brought you one," said Cellini, stepping back, and throwing down the sword he held in his left hand at Pagolo's feet.

Pagolo looked at the sword, but made no movement.

"Come," said Cellini, "pick up the sword and stand up yourself. I am waiting."

"A duel?" muttered the apprentice, whose teeth were chattering with terror; "am I able to fight a duel on equal terms with you?"

"Very well," said Cellini, passing his weapon from one hand to the other, "I will fight with my left hand, and that will make us equal."

"I fight with you, my benefactor?—you, to whom I owe everything? Never! never!"

A smile of profound contempt overspread Benvenuto's face, while Scozzone recoiled without seeking to conceal the disgust which showed itself in her expression.

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"You should have remembered my benefactions before stealing from me the woman I intrusted to your honor and Ascanio's," said Benvenuto. "Your memory has come back to you too late. On guard, Pagolo! on guard!"

"No! no!" murmured the coward, falling back upon his knees.

"As you refuse to fight like an honest man," said Benvenuto, "I propose to punish you as a scoundrel."

He replaced his sword in its sheath, drew his dagger, and walked slowly toward the apprentice without the slightest indication either of anger or compassion upon his impassive features.

Scozzone rushed between them with a shriek; but Benvenuto, without violence, with a motion of his arm as irresistible as that of a bronze statue endowed with life, put her aside, and the poor girl fell back half dead upon her chair. Benvenuto walked on toward Pagolo, who receded as far as the wall. There the master overtook him, and said, putting his dagger to his throat, —

"Commend your soul to God: you have five minutes to live."

"Mercy!" cried Pagolo in an inarticulate voice; "do not kill me! mercy! mercy!"

"What!" said Cellini, "you know me, and, knowing me, seduced the woman who belonged to me. I know all, I have discovered everything, and you hope that I will spare you! You are laughing at me, Pagolo, you are laughing at me."

Benvenuto himself laughed aloud as he spoke; but it was a strident, terrible laugh, which made the apprentice shudder to his marrow.

"Master! master!" cried Pagolo, as he felt the point

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of the dagger pricking his throat; "it was she, not I: yes, she led me into it."

"Treachery, cowardice, and slander! I will make a group of those three monsters some day," said Benvenuto, "and it will be a hideous thing to see. She led you into it, you reptile! Do you forget that I was here and heard all that you said?"

"O Benvenuto," murmured Catherine, "you know that he lies when he says that, do you not?"

"Yes, yes," said Benvenuto, "I know that he lies when he says that, as he lied when he said that he was ready to marry you; but never fear, he shall be punished for the double lie."

"Yes, punish me," cried Pagolo, "but be merciful: punish me, but do not kill me."

"You lied when you said that she led you into it?"

"Yes, I lied; yes, I am the guilty one. I loved her madly; and you know, master, what love will lead a man to do."

"You lied when you said that you were ready to marry her?"

"No, no, master; then I did n't lie."

"So you really love Scozzone?"

"Oh, yes, indeed I love her!" replied Pagolo, realizing that the only way of lessening his guilt in Cellini's eyes was to attribute his crime to the violence of his passion; "yes, I love her."

"And you say again that you were not lying when you proposed to marry her?"

"I was not lying, master."

"You would have made her your wife?"

"If she had not belonged to you, yes."

"Very well, then, take her: I give her to you."

"What do you say? You are joking, are you not?"

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"No, I never spoke more seriously: look at me if you doubt it."

Pagolo glanced furtively at Cellini, and saw plainly in his face that the judge might at any moment give place to the executioner; he bowed his head, therefore, with a groan.

"Take that ring from your finger, Pagolo, and put it on Catherine's."

Pagolo passively obeyed the first portion of the order, and Benvenuto motioned to Scozzone to draw near. She obeyed.

"Put out your hand, Scozzone," continued Benvenuto.

Again she obeyed.

"Now do the rest."

Pagolo placed the ring upon Scozzone's finger.

"Now," said Benvenuto, "that the betrothal is duly accomplished, we will pass to the marriage."

"Marriage!" muttered Pagolo; "we can't be married in this way; we must have notaries and a priest."

"We must have a contract," rejoined Benvenuto, producing the one prepared under his orders. "Here is one all ready, in which the names only need to be inserted."

He placed the contract upon a table, took up a pen and handed it to Pagolo.

"Sign, Pagolo," said he, "sign."

"Ah! I have fallen into a trap," muttered the apprentice.

"Eh? what's that?" exclaimed Benvenuto, without raising his voice, but imparting to it an ominous accent. "A trap? Where is the trap in this? Did I urge you to come to Scozzone's room? Did I advise you to tell her that you wished to make her your wife? Very good! make her your wife, Pagolo, and when you are

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her husband our *rôles* will be changed; if I come to her room, it will be your turn to threaten, and mine to be afraid."

"Oh, that would be too absurd!" cried Catherine, passing from extreme terror to hysterical gayety, and laughing aloud at the idea which the master's words evoked.

Somewhat reassured by the turn Cellini's threats had taken, and by Catherine's peals of laughter, Pagolo began to look at matters a little more reasonably. It became plain to him that Cellini wished to frighten him into a marriage for which he felt but little inclination: he considered, therefore, that that would be rather too tragic a termination of the comedy, and that he might perhaps, with a little resolution, make a better bargain.

"Yes," he muttered, translating Scozzone's gayety into words, "yes, it would be very amusing, I agree, but unfortunately it cannot be."

"What! it cannot be!" cried Benvenuto, as amazed as a lion might be to find a fox demurring to his will.

"No, it cannot be," Pagolo repeated; "I prefer to die: kill me!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when Cellini was upon him. Pagolo saw the dagger gleaming in the air, and threw himself to one side, so swiftly and successfully that the blow which was intended for him simply grazed his shoulder, and the blade, impelled by the goldsmith's powerful hand, penetrated the wainscoting to the depth of several inches.

"I consent," cried Pagolo. "Mercy! Cellini, I consent; I am ready to do anything." And while the master was withdrawing the dagger, which had come in contact with the wall behind the wainscoting, he ran to

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the table where the contract lay, seized the pen, and wrote his name. The whole affair had taken place so rapidly that Scozzone had no time to take part in it.

"Thanks, Pagolo," said she, wiping away the tears which terror had brought to her eyes, and at the same time repressing an inclination to smile; "thanks, dear Pagolo, for the honor you consent to confer upon me; but it's better that we should understand each other thoroughly now, so listen to me. Just now you would have none of me, and now I will have none of you. I don't say this to mortify you, Pagolo, but I do not love you, and I desire to remain as I am."

"In that case," said Benvenuto, with the utmost coolness, "if you won't have him, Scozzone, he must die."

"Why," cried Catherine, "it is I who refuse him."

"He must die," rejoined Benvenuto; "it shall not be said that a man insulted me, and went unpunished. Are you ready, Pagolo?"

"Catherine," cried the apprentice, "Catherine, in Heaven's name take pity on me! Catherine, I love you! Catherine, I will love you always! Sign, Catherine! Catherine be my wife, I beg you on my knees!"

"Come, Scozzone, decide quickly," said Cellini.

"Oh!" said Catherine, pouting, "tell me, master, don't you think you are rather hard on me, who have loved you so dearly, and who have dreamed of something so different? But," cried the fickle child, passing suddenly from melancholy to merriment once more, "Mon Dieu! Cellini, see what a piteous face poor Pagolo is making! Oh, for Heaven's sake, put aside that lugubrious expression, Pagolo, or I will never consent to take you for my husband! Really, you are too absurd!"

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"Save me first, Catherine," said Pagolo; "then we will laugh, if you choose."

"Oh well! my poor boy, if you really and truly wish it—"

"Yes, indeed I do!"

"You know what I have been, you know what I am?"

"Yes, I know"

"You are not deceived in me?"

"No."

"You will not regret it?"

"No! no!"

"Then give me your hand. It's very ridiculous, and I hardly expected it; but, no matter, I am your wife."

She took the pen and signed, as a dutiful wife should do, below her husband's signature.

"Thanks, Catherine, thanks!" cried Pagolo; "you will see how happy I will make you."

"If he is false to that promise," said Benvenuto, "write to me, Scozzone, and wherever I may be I will come in person to remind him of it."

As he spoke, Cellini slowly pushed his dagger back into its sheath, keeping his eyes fixed upon the apprentice; then he took the contract, folded it neatly, and put it in his pocket, and said to Pagolo, with the withering sarcasm which was characteristic of him:—

"Now, friend Pagolo, although you and Scozzone are duly married according to the laws of men, you are not in God's sight, and the Church will not sanctify your union until to-morrow. Until then your presence here would be in contravention of all laws, divine and human. Good night, Pagolo."

Pagolo turned pale as death; but as Benvenuto

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pointed imperatively to the door, he backed out of the room.

"No one but you, Cellini, would ever have had such an idea as that," said Catherine, laughing as if she would die. "Hark ye, my poor Pagolo," she said, as he opened the door, "I let you go because the law requires it; but never fear, Pagolo, I swear by the Blessed Virgin, that when you are my husband no man, not even Benvenuto himself, will find me anything but a virtuous wife.

"O Cellini!" she added, gayly, when the door was closed, "you give me a husband, but relieve me of his presence for to-day. It is so much time gained: you owed me this reparation."

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XXI.

RESUMPTION OF HOSTILITIES.

THREE days after the scene we have described, a scene of quite another sort was in preparation at the Louvre.

Monday, the day appointed for signing the contract, had arrived. It was eleven o'clock in the morning when Benvenuto left the Hôtel de Nesle, went straight to the Louvre, and with anxious heart but firm step ascended the grand staircase.

In the reception-room, into which he was first ushered, he found the provost and D'Orbec, who were conferring with a notary in the corner. Colombe, pale and motionless as a statue, was seated on the other side of the room, staring into vacancy. They had evidently moved away from her so that she could not hear, and the poor child had remained where they placed her.

Cellini passed in front of her, and let these words fall upon her bowed head: —

"Have courage: I am here."

Colombe recognized his voice, and raised her head with a cry of joy; but before she had time to question her protector, he had already entered the adjoining room.

An usher drew aside a tapestry portière, and the goldsmith passed into the king's cabinet.

Nothing less than these words of cheer would have availed to revive Colombe's courage: the poor child be-

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lieved that she was abandoned, and consequently lost. Messire d'Estourville had dragged her thither, half dead, despite her faith in God and in Benvenuto. As they were setting out, she was conscious of such a feeling of despair at her heart, that she implored Madame d'Etampes to allow her to enter a convent, promising to renounce Ascanio provided that she might be spared Cömte d'Orbec. But the duchess wanted no half victory; in order that her purpose might be attained, it was essential that Ascanio should believe in the treachery of his beloved, and so she sternly refused to listen to poor Colombe's prayers. Thereupon, Colombe summoned all her courage, remembering that Benvenuto bade her be strong and brave, even at the altar's foot, and with occasional sinkings of the heart allowed herself to be taken to the Louvre, where the king was to sign the contract at noon.

There again her strength failed her for a moment; for but three chances now remained, to touch the king's heart with her prayers, to see Benvenuto arrive, or to die of grief.

Benvenuto had come; Benvenuto had told her to hope, and Colombe's courage revived once more.

On entering the king's cabinet, Cellini found Madame d'Etampes alone: it was all that he desired; he would have solicited the honor of seeing her had she not been there.

The duchess was thoughtful in her hour of triumph, and yet, with the fatal letter burned — burned by herself — she was fully convinced that she had nothing to fear. But although she was reassured as to her power, she contemplated with dismay the perils that threatened her love. It was always thus with the duchess: when the anxiety attendant upon her ambition was at rest,

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the ardent passions of her heart devoured her. Her dream, in which pride and passion were mingled, was to make Ascanio great while making him happy. But she knew now that Ascanio, although of noble origin, (for the Gaddis, to which family he belonged, were patricians of long standing at Florence,) aspired to no other glory than that of being a great artist.

If his hopes were ever fixed upon anything, it was some beautifully shaped vase, or ewer, or statue; if he ever longed for diamonds or pearls, it was so that he might make of them, by setting them in chased gold, lovelier flowers than those which heaven waters with its dew. Titles and honors were nothing to him if they did not flow from his own talent, and were not the guerdon of his personal renown; what part could such a useless dreamer play in the active, agitated life of the duchess? In the first storm the delicate plant would be destroyed, with the flowers which it already bore and the fruit of which it gave promise. It might be that he would allow himself to be drawn into the schemes of his royal mistress through discouragement or through indifference; but in that case, a pale and melancholy shadow, he would live only in his memories of the past. Ascanio, in fine, appeared to the Duchesse d'Etampes, as he really was, an exquisite, fascinating personality, so long as he remained in a pure, untroubled atmosphere; he was an adorable child, who would never become a man. He could devote himself to sentiments, but never to ideas; born to enjoy the outpourings of a mutual affection, he would inevitably go down in the first terrific onset of the struggle for supremacy and power. He was the man needed to satisfy Madame d'Etampes's passion, but not to keep pace with her in her ambitious schemes.

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Such was the tenor of her reflections when Benvenuto entered: the clouds of her thought hovering about her darkened her brow.

The two adversaries eyed each other narrowly: the same satirical smile appeared upon their lips at the same time; the glances they exchanged were twin brothers, and indicated that they were equally prepared for the struggle, and that the struggle would be a desperate one.

"Well and good! he is a rough fighter," thought Anne, "whom it will be a pleasure to overcome, a foeman worthy of my steel. But to-day there are, in truth, too many chances against him, and there will be no great glory in overthrowing him."

"Beyond question, Madame d'Etampes," said Benvenuto to himself, "you are a masterful woman, and more than one contest with a strong man has given me less trouble than this I have entered upon with you. You may be sure, therefore, that, while fighting courteously, I shall none the less fight with all the weapons at my disposal."

There was a moment's silence while the combatants delivered themselves of these brief monologues aside. The duchess was the first to break the silence.

"You are punctual, Master Cellini," said she. "His Majesty is to sign Comte d'Orbec's contract at noon, and it is now only a quarter past eleven. Permit me to make his Majesty's excuses: he is not behindhand, but you are beforehand."

"I am very happy, madame, that I arrived too early, as my impatience procures me the honor of a *tête-à-tête* with you, — an honor I should have requested most urgently, had not chance, to which I return my thanks, anticipated my wishes."

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"Good lack, Benvenuto!" said the duchess; "does defeat incline you to flattery?"

"Not my own defeat, madame, but that of other persons. I have always considered it peculiarly meritorious to pay my court to one in disgrace; and here is the proof of it, madame."

As he spoke, Benvenuto drew from beneath his cloak Ascanio's golden lily, which he had completed that morning. The duchess exclaimed with wonder and delight. Never had her eyes beheld such a marvellous jewel, never did one of the flowers found in the enchanted gardens of the "Thousand and One Nights" so dazzle the eyes of peri or fairy.

"Ah!" cried the duchess, putting forth her hand to take the flower, "you promised me, Benvenuto, but I confess that I did not rely upon your promise."

"Why should you not rely upon it, madame?" laughed Benvenuto. "You insult me."

"Oh! if you had promised to perform a revengeful, instead of a gallant act, I should have been much more certain that you would redeem your promise punctually."

"Who told you that I did not promise both?" retorted Benvenuto, drawing back his hand, so that the lily was still in his control.

"I do not understand you," said the duchess.

"Do you not think," said Benvenuto, pointing to the diamond shimmering in the heart of the flower — the diamond which she owed to the corrupting munificence of Charles V. — "that when mounted in the guise of a dewdrop, the earnest given to bind a certain bargain which is to set off the Duchy of Milan from France has a fine effect?"

"You speak in enigmas, my dear goldsmith; unfortu

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nately the king will soon be here, and I have n't time to guess them."

"I will tell you the answer, then. It is an old proverb, *Verba volant, scripta manent*, which, being interpreted, means, 'What is written is written.'"

"Ah! that 's where you are in error, my dear goldsmith; what is written is burned: so do not think to frighten me as you would a child, and give me the lily which belongs to me."

"One instant, madame; I ought to warn you that while it is a magic talisman in my hands, it will lose all its virtue in yours. My work is even more valuable than you think. Where the multitude sees only a jewel, we artists sometimes conceal an idea. Do you wish me to show you this idea, madame? Nothing is easier: look, all that is necessary is to press this invisible spring. The stalk opens, as you see, and in the heart of the flower we find, not a gnawing worm, as in some natural flowers and some false hearts, but something similar, worse it may be, — the dishonor of the Duchesse d'Etampes, written with her own hand and signed by her."

As he spoke, Benvenuto pressed the spring, opened the stalk, and took out the letter. He slowly unfolded it, and showed it, open, to the duchess, pale with wrath, and stricken dumb with dismay.

"You hardly expected this, did you, madame?" said Benvenuto, coolly, folding the letter once more, and replacing it in the lily. "If you knew my ways, madame, you would be less surprised. A year ago I concealed a ladder in a statuette; a month ago I concealed a maiden in a statue. What was there that I could hide away in a flower to-day? A bit of paper, that was all, and that is what I have done."

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"But that letter," cried the duchess, "that infernal letter I burned with my own hands: I saw the flame and touched the ashes!"

"Did you read the letter you burned?"

"No! no! madwoman that I was, I did not read it!"

"That is too bad, for you would be convinced now that the letter of a grisette will make as much flame and ashes as the letter of a duchess."

"Why, then, Ascanio, the dastard, deceived me!"

"Oh madame! pray pause! Do not suspect that pure and innocent child, who, even if he had deceived you, would have done no more than turn against you the weapons you used against him. Oh no, no! he did not deceive you; he would not purchase his own life or Colombe's by deceit! No, he was himself deceived."

"By whom? Pray tell me that."

"By a mere boy, a student, the same who wounded your trusty retainer, Vicomte de Marmagne; by one Jacques Aubry, in short, whom it is likely that the Vicomte de Marmagne has mentioned to you."

"Yes," murmured the duchess, "yes, Marmagne did tell me that this student, this Jacques Aubry, was seeking to gain access to Ascanio in order to secure that letter."

"And it was after that that you paid Ascanio a visit. But students are active, you know, and ours had already anticipated you. As you left the Hôtel d'Etampes, he was creeping into his friend's cell, and as you entered it, he went out."

"But I did n't see him; I saw nobody."

"One does n't think to look everywhere; if you had done so, you would, in due course, have raised a certain mat, and under that mat would have found a hole communicating with the adjoining cell."

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"But Ascanio, Ascanio?"

"When you entered he was asleep, was he not?"

"Yes."

"Very good! during his sleep, Aubry, to whom he had refused to give the letter, took it from his coat pocket, and put a letter of his own in its place. You were misled by the envelope, and thought that you were burning a note from Madame la Duchesse d'Etampes. Not so, madame; you burned an epistle penned by Mademoiselle Gervaise-Perrette Popinot."

"But this Aubry, who wounded Marmagne, this clown, who almost murdered a nobleman, will pay dear for his insolence; he is in prison and condemned to death."

"He is free, madame, and owes his freedom in great measure to you."

"How so?"

"Why, who but he was the poor prisoner whose pardon you joined me in urging upon King François?"

"Oh insane fool that I was!" muttered the duchess, biting her lips till the blood ran. She looked Benvenuto squarely in the eye for a moment, then continued, in a panting voice, —

"On what condition will you give me that letter?"

"I think I have allowed you to guess, madame."

"I am not skilled in guessing: tell me."

"You must ask the king to bestow Colombe's hand upon Ascanio."

"Go to!" rejoined Anne with a forced laugh; "you little know the Duchesse d'Etampes, Master Goldsmith, if you fancy that my love will yield to threats."

"You did not reflect before answering me, madame."

"I stand by my answer, however."

"Kindly permit me to sit down unceremoniously,

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madame, and to talk plainly with you a moment," said Benvenuto, with the dignified familiarity peculiar to superior men. "I am only an humble sculptor, and you are a great duchess; but let me tell you that, notwithstanding the distance which separates us, we were made to understand each other. Do not assume those queenly airs: they will have no effect. It is not my purpose to insult you, but to enlighten you, and your haughty manner is out of place because your pride is not at stake."

"You are a strange man, upon my word," said Anne, laughing in spite of herself. "Say on, I am listening."

"I was saying, Madame la Duchesse," continued Benvenuto, coolly, "that, despite the difference in our fortunes, our positions are almost the same, and that we could understand each other, and perhaps mutually assist each other. You cried out when I suggested that you should renounce Ascanio; it seemed to you impossible and mad, and yet I had set you an example, madame."

"An example?"

"Yes, as you love Ascanio, I loved Colombe."

"You?"

"I. I loved her as I had never loved but once. I would have given my blood, my life, my soul for her, and yet I gave her to Ascanio."

"Truly a most unselfish passion," sneered the duchess.

"Oh! do not make my suffering matter for raillery, madame; do not mock at my agony. I have suffered keenly; but I realized that the child was no more made for me than Ascanio for you. Listen, madame: we are both, if I may be pardoned for the comparison, of those exceptional and uncommon natures which lead an existence of their own, have feelings and emotions peculiar

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to themselves, and rarely find themselves in accord with others. We both obey, madame, a sovereign idol, the worship of which has expanded our hearts and placed us higher than mankind. To you, madame, ambition is all in all; to me, art. Now our divinities are jealous, and exert their sway always and everywhere. You desired Ascanio as a crown, I desired Colombe as a Galatea. You loved as a duchess, I as an artist. You have persecuted, I have suffered. Oh! do not think that I wrong you in my thoughts; I admire your energy, and sympathize with your audacity. Let the vulgar think what they will: from your point of view it is a great thing to turn the world upside down in order to make a place for the person one loves. I recognize therein a strong and masterful passion, and I admire characters capable of such heroic crimes; but I also admire superhuman characters, for everything which eludes foresight, everything outside the beaten paths, has an attraction for me. Even while I loved Colombe, madame, I considered that my domineering, unruly nature would be ill mated with that pure angelic soul. Colombe loved Ascanio, my harmless, sweet-natured pupil; my rough, vigorous temperament would have frightened her. Thereupon, in a loud, imperative tone, I bade my love hold its peace, and as it remonstrated I called to my assistance my art divine, and by our united efforts we floored the rebellious passion and held it down. Then Sculpture, my true, my only mistress, touched my brow with her burning lips, and I was comforted. Do as I have done, Madame la Duchesse, leave these children to their angel loves and do not disturb them in their heaven. Our domain is earth, with its sorrows, its conflicts, and its intoxicating triumphs. Seek a refuge against suffering in ambition;

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unmake empires to distract your thoughts; play with the kings and masters of the world to amuse yourself. That would be well done, and I would applaud your efforts. But do not wreck the peace and happiness of these poor innocents, who love each other with such a pure, sweet love, before the face of God and the Virgin Mary."

"Who are you, Master Benvenuto Cellini? I do not know you," said the duchess in blank amazement. "Who are you?"

"Vrai Dieu! a man among men, as you are a woman among women," rejoined the goldsmith, laughing with his customary frankness; "and if you do not know me, you see that I have a great advantage over you, for I do know you, madame."

"It may be so," said the duchess, "but it is my opinion that a woman among women loves better and more earnestly than a man among men, for she snaps her fingers at your superhuman abnegation, and defends her lover with beak and claws to the last gasp."

"You persist, then, in refusing to give Ascanio to Colombe?"

"I persist in loving him myself."

"So be it. But if you will not yield with good grace, beware! I am somewhat rough when I am roused, and may make you cry out a little in the *mêlée*. You have reflected fully, have you not? You refuse once for all your consent to the union of Ascanio and Colombe."

"Most emphatically, yes."

"Very good! to our posts!" cried Benvenuto, "for the battle is on."

At that moment the door opened and an usher announced the king.

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XXII.

A LOVE MATCH.

François appeared on the threshold, giving his hand to Diane de Poitiers, with whom he had come from the bedside of his sick son. Diane, inspired by her hatred, had a vague feeling that her rival was threatened with humiliation, and did not choose to miss the gratifying spectacle.

As for the king, he saw nothing, suspected nothing; he believed Madame d'Etampes and Benvenuto to be entirely reconciled, and as he saw them talking together when he entered, he saluted them both at once, with the same smile, and the same inclination of the head.

"Good morrow, my queen of beauty; good morrow, my king of artists," he said; "what are you talking about so confidentially? You seem both to be deeply interested."

"Mon Dieu! Sire, we are talking politics," said Benvenuto.

"And what particular subject exercises your faculties? Tell me, I beg."

"The question which engrosses everybody at present, Sire," continued the goldsmith.

"Ah! the Duchy of Milan."

"Yes, Sire."

"Well, what were you saying of it?"

"We do not agree, Sire; one of us maintains that the Emperor might well refuse to give you the Duchy of

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Milan, and yet redeem his promise by giving it to your son Charles."

"Which of you makes that suggestion?"

"I think that it was Madame d'Etampes, Sire."

The duchess became pale as death.

"If the Emperor should do that, it would be infamous treachery," said François; "but he 'll not do it."

"In any event, even if he does not do it," said Diane, joining in the conversation, "it will not be, I am assured, for lack of advice given him to that effect."

"Given by whom?" cried the king. "By Mahomet's belly! I would be glad to know by whom?"

"Bon Dieu! do not be so disturbed, Sire," rejoined Benvenuto; "we said that as we said other things, — simple conjectures, put forward by us in desultory talk. Madame la Duchesse and I are but bungling politicians, Sire. Madame la Duchesse is too much of a woman to think of aught beside her toilet, although she has no need to think of that; and I, Sire, am too much of an artist to think of aught beside art. Is it not so, Madame la Duchesse?"

"The truth is, my dear Cellini," said François, "that each of you has too glorious a part to play to envy others aught that they may have, even though it were the Duchy of Milan. Madame la Duchesse d'Etampes is queen by virtue of her beauty, and you are king by virtue of your talent."

"King, Sire?"

"Yes, king; and although you have n't, as I have, three lilies in your crest, you have one in your hand, which seems to me to be lovelier than any that ever blossomed in the brightest sunlight or upon the fairest field in all heraldry."

"This lily is not mine, Sire; it belongs to Madame

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d'Etampes, who commissioned my pupil Ascanio to make it; but as he could not finish it, and as I realized Madame d'Etampes's desire to have so rich a jewel in her possession, I set to work myself and finished it, wishing with all my heart to make it the symbol of the treaty of peace which we ratified the other day in your Majesty's presence."

"It is marvellously beautiful," said the king, putting out his hand to take it.

"Is it not, sire?" rejoined Benvenuto, withdrawing it as if without design, "and the young artist, whose *chef-d'œuvre* it is, certainly deserves to be magnificently rewarded."

"Such is my purpose," interposed the duchess; "I have in store for him a recompense which a king might envy him."

"But you know, madame, that the recompense to which you refer, splendid as it is, is not that upon which his heart is fixed. What would you have, madame? We artists are whimsical creatures, and often the thing which would, as you say, arouse a king's envy, is viewed by us with disdainful eye."

"Nevertheless," said Madame d'Etampes, as an angry flush overspread her face, "he must be content with what I have set apart for him; for I have already told you, Benvenuto, that I would accord him no other save at the last extremity."

"Very well, you may confide to me what his wishes are," said François to Benvenuto, once more putting out his hand for the lily, "and if it 's not too difficult a matter, we will try to arrange it."

"Observe the jewel carefully, Sire," said Benvenuto, placing the stalk of the flower in the king's hand; "examine it in detail, and your Majesty will see that any

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compensation whatsoever must fall short of the value of such a masterpiece."

As he spoke, Benvenuto darted a keen glance at the duchess; but her self-control was so perfect, that not a muscle of her face moved as she saw the lily pass from the artist's hand to the king's.

"'T is really miraculous," said the king. "But where did you find this superb diamond which glistens in the heart of the flower?"

"I did not find it, Sire," replied Cellini, with charming affability; "Madame d'Etampes furnished it to my pupil."

"I was not aware that you owned this diamond, madame; whence came it to your hands, pray?"

"Why, probably from the place where most diamonds come from, Sire; from the mines of Guzarate or Golconda."

"There is a long story connected with that diamond, Sire, and if your Majesty cares to hear it, I will tell it you. The diamond and I are old acquaintances, for this is the third time it has passed through my hands. In the first place, I set it in the tiara of our Holy Father, the Pope, where its effect was marvellous; then, by order of Clement VII., I mounted it upon a missal which his Holiness presented to the Emperor Charles V.; and as the Emperor desired to carry it constantly about him, as a resource doubtless in an emergency, I set the diamond, which is worth more than a million, in a ring, Sire. Did not your Majesty observe it on the hand of your cousin, the Emperor?"

"Yes, I remember," cried the king; "yes, on the day of our first interview he had it on his finger. How comes the diamond in your possession, duchess?"

"Yes, tell us," cried Diane, whose eyes shone with

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joy, "how came it about that a diamond of that value passed from the Emperor's hands to yours?"

"If the question were put to you, madame," retorted Madame d'Etampes, "the answer would not be far to seek, assuming that you confess certain matters to any other than your confessor."

"You do not answer the king's question, madame," rejoined Diane.

"Yes," said François, "how comes the diamond in your possession?"

"Ask Benvenuto," said Madame d'Etampes, hurling a last defiance at her enemy; "Benvenuto will tell you."

"Tell me, then," said the king, "and instantly: I am weary of waiting."

"Very good, Sire," said Benvenuto; "I must confess to your Majesty that at sight of this diamond strange suspicions awoke in my mind, as in yours. It was while Madame d'Etampes and myself were at enmity, you must know, and I should not have been sorry to learn some little secret which might injure her in your Majesty's eyes. So I followed the scent, and I learned —"

"You learned?"

Benvenuto glanced hastily at the duchess, and saw that she was smiling. The power of resistance which she manifested pleased him, and, instead of putting an end to the struggle brutally with one stroke, he resolved to prolong it, like an athlete, sure of victory in the end, who, having fallen in with an antagonist worthy of him, resolves to display all his strength and all his skill.

"You learned —" the king repeated.

"I learned that she purchased it of Manasseh, the Jew. Yes, Sire, know this and govern yourself accord-

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ingly: it seems that since he entered France your cousin, the Emperor, has scattered so much money along the road, that he is reduced to putting his diamonds in pawn; and Madame d'Etampes, with royal magnificence, gathers in what the imperial poverty cannot retain."

"Ah! by my honor as a gentleman, 't is most diverting!" cried François, doubly flattered in his vanity as lover, and in his jealousy as king. "But, fair lady," he added, addressing the duchess, "methinks you must have ruined yourself in order to make such an acquisition, and it is for us to repair the disordered state of your finances. Remember that we are your debtor to the value of the diamond, for it is so magnificent that I am determined that it shall come to you from a king's hand at least, if not from an emperor's."

"Thanks, Benvenuto," said the duchess in an undertone; "I begin to believe, as you claim, that we were made to understand each other."

"What are you saying?" cried the king.

"Oh, nothing, Sire! I was apologizing to the duchess for my first suspicion, which she deigns to pardon, — a favor which is the more generous on her part, in that the lily gave birth to another suspicion."

"What was that?" demanded the king, while Diane, whose hate was too keen to allow her to be deceived by this comedy, devoured her triumphant rival with her eyes.

Madame d'Etampes saw that she was not yet quit of her indefatigable foe, and a shadow of dread passed across her face, but it should be said, in justice to her courage, only to disappear immediately.

Furthermore, she availed herself of the king's preoccupation, caused by Benvenuto's words, to try to gain

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possession of the lily; but Benvenuto carelessly placed himself between the king and her.

"What was the suspicion? Oh!" the goldsmith said with a smile, "it was so infamous that I am not sure that I should n't be ashamed of having had it, and that it would not add to my offence to be so shameless as to avow it. I must have an express command from your Majesty before I should dare —"

"Dare, Cellini! I command you!" said the king.

"So be it. In the first place," said Cellini, "I confess with an artist's candid pride, that I was surprised to see Madame d'Etampes intrust the apprentice with a task which the master would have been happy and proud to execute for her. You remember my apprentice, Ascanio, Sire? He is a charming youth, who might venture to pose for Endymion, upon my word."

"Well! what then?" said the king, his brows contracting at the suspicion which began to gnaw his heart.

This time it was evident that, for all her self-control, Madame d'Etampes was on the rack. In the first place she read malicious curiosity in the eyes of Diane de Poitiers, and in the second place she was well aware that, while François might have forgiven treason to the king, he certainly would not forgive infidelity to the lover. However, as if he did not notice her agony, Benvenuto continued: —

"I reflected upon the beauty of my Ascanio, and it occurred to me — forgive me, mesdames, if there was anything in the thought which seems to cast a reflection upon the French, but I am accustomed to the ways of our Italian princesses, who, in love, it must be confessed, are very weak creatures — it occurred to me that a sentiment which had little connection with art —"

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"Master," said François, frowning darkly, "reflect before you speak."

"I apologized beforehand for my temerity, and asked to be permitted to hold my peace."

"I bear witness to that," said Diane; "you yourself bade him speak, Sire; and now that he has begun — "

"It is always time to stop," said Madame d'Etampes, "when one knows that what one is about to say is a falsehood."

"I will stop if you choose, madame," said Benvenuto; "you know that you have but to say the word."

"Yes, but I choose that he shall continue. You are right, Diane; there are matters here which must be probed to the bottom. Say on, monsieur, say on," said the king, keeping his eyes fixed upon the sculptor and the duchess.

"My conjectures were taking a wide range when an incredible discovery opened a new field to them."

"What was it?" cried the king and Diane de Poitiers in the same breath.

"I am getting in very deep," whispered Cellini to the duchess.

"Sire," said she, "you do not need to hold the lily in your hand to listen to this long discourse. Your Majesty is so accustomed to hold a sceptre in a firm grasp, that I fear the fragile flower may be broken in your fingers."

As she spoke, the duchess, with one of those smiles which belonged to her alone, put out her hand to take the jewel.

"Forgive me, Madame la Duchesse," said Cellini; "but as the lily plays an important part throughout my story, permit me to enforce my words with ocular demonstration."

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"The lily plays an important part in the story you have to tell, master?" cried Diane, snatching the flower from the king's hand with a movement swift as thought. "In that case, Madame d'Etampes is right, for if the story is at all what I suspect, it is much better that the lily should be in my hands than in yours, Sire; for, purposely or not, your Majesty might, by some uncontrollable impulse, break it."

Madame d'Etampes became terribly pale, for she deemed herself lost; she hastily seized Benvenuto's hand, and her lips opened to speak, but almost immediately she thought better of it. Her hand let the artist's fall, and her lips closed again.

"Say what you have to say," she muttered through her clenched teeth, — "if you dare!" she added in so low a tone that Benvenuto alone could hear.

"Yes, and measure your words, my master," said the king.

"And do you, madame, measure your silence," said Benvenuto.

"We are waiting!" cried Diane, unable to restrain her impatience.

"Fancy, Sire, and you, madame, fancy that Ascanio and Madame la Duchesse d'Etampes corresponded."

The duchess looked about to see if there were not at hand some weapon with which she could silence the goldsmith's tongue forever.

"Corresponded?" echoed the king.

"Yes, corresponded; and the most extraordinary thing is that the subject of this correspondence between Madame la Duchesse d'Etampes and the humble carver's apprentice was love."

"The proofs, master! you have proofs, I trust!" cried the king, in a rage.

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"O mon Dieu! yes, Sire," replied Benvenuto. "Your Majesty must understand that I should not have allowed myself to form such suspicions without proofs."

"Produce them instantly, then," said the king.

"When I say that I have them, I am in error: your Majesty had them a moment since."

"I!" cried the king.

"And Madame de Poitiers has them now."

"I!" cried Diane.

"Yes," rejoined Benvenuto, who, amid the king's wrath, and the hatred and terror of the two most powerful women in the world, was perfectly cool and complacent. "Yes, for the proofs are in the lily."

"In the lily?" cried the king, snatching the flower from the hands of Diane de Poitiers, and examining it with a careful scrutiny, in which love of art had no share. "In this lily?"

"Yes, Sire, in the lily," Benvenuto repeated. "You know that it is so, madame," he continued in a meaning tone, toward the gasping duchess.

"Let us come to terms," she whispered; "Colombe shall not marry D'Orbec."

"That is not enough," returned Cellini; "Ascanio must marry Colombe."

"Never!" exclaimed Madame d'Etampes.

Meanwhile the king was turning the fatal lily over and over in his fingers, his suspense and wrath being the more poignant in that he dared not express them openly.

"The proofs are in the lily! in the lily!" he repeated; "but I can see nothing in the lily."

"Because your Majesty does not know the secret of opening it."

"There is a secret. Show it me, messire, on the instant, or rather —"

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François made a movement as if to crush the flower, but both women cried out, and he checked himself.

"Oh Sire! it would be a pity," cried Diane; "such a charming toy! Give it to me, Sire, and I promise you that if there is a secret I will find it."

Her slender, active fingers, to which hatred lent additional subtlety, passed over all the rough places on the jewel, felt in all the hollows, while the Duchesse d'Etampes, half fainting, followed with haggard eyes her investigations, which for a moment were without result. But at last, whether by good luck, or a rival's instinct of divination, Diane touched the precise spot on the stalk.

The flower opened.

The two women cried out again at the same moment; one with joy, the other with dismay. The duchess darted forward to tear the lily from Diane's hand, but Benvenuto held her back with one hand, while with the other he showed her the letter which he had taken from its hiding place. A swift glance at the flower showed her that the hiding place was empty.

"I agree to everything," said the duchess, completely crushed, and too weak to maintain such a contest.

"On the Gospel?" said Benvenuto.

"On the Gospel."

"Well, master," said the king, impatiently, "where are the proofs? I see a recess very cleverly hollowed out in the stalk, but there is nothing within it."

"No, sire, there is nothing," said Benvenuto.

"True, but there might have been something," suggested Diane.

"Madame is right," said Benvenuto.

"Master!" cried the king through his clenched teeth, "do you know that it may be dangerous for you to

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prolong this pleasantry, and that stronger men than you have repented playing with my anger?"

"For that reason I should be in despair were I to incur it, Sire," rejoined Cellini, without losing his composure; "but there is nothing in the present circumstances to arouse it, for I trust your Majesty did not take my words seriously. Should I have dared to bring so grave an accusation so lightly? Madame d'Etampes can show you the letters this lily contained, if you are curious to see them. They are in fact concerned with love, but it is the love of my poor Ascanio for a noble demoiselle, — a passion which at first seems insane and impossible, doubtless; but my Ascanio, like the true artist he is, fancying that a beautiful jewel falls not far short of equalling in value a beautiful maiden, applied to Madame d'Etampes as to a special providence, and made this lily his messenger. Now, you know, Sire, that Providence can do anything, and you will not be jealous of this particular one, I fancy, since, while doing a kindly action, she attributes part of the credit to you. That is the solution of the enigma, Sire, and if all the beating about the bush I have indulged in has offended your Majesty, I pray you to forgive me in consideration of the familiarity to which you have been graciously pleased to admit me."

This quasi academic harangue changed the face of affairs. As Benvenuto went on, Diane's brow grew dark, while the wrinkles vanished from that of Madame d'Etampes, and the king resumed his smiling good humor. When Benvenuto had finished, —

"Forgive me, fair duchess," said François, "for having dared to suspect you for an instant. Tell me what I can do to redeem my offence and earn my forgiveness."

"Grant the request which Madame la Duchesse

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d'Etampes is about to make, as your Majesty heretofore granted the one that I made."

"Speak for me, Master Cellini, since you know what it is that I wish," said the duchess with better grace than Cellini would have thought possible.

"Very well: since Madame la Duchesse apppoints me to be her mouthpiece, Sire, you must know that she desires your all-powerful intervention in favor of poor Ascanio's passion."

"Yes, yes!" laughed the king; "I agree with all my heart to assist in making the comely apprentice a happy man. What is the name of his sweetheart?"

"Colombe d'Estourville, sire."

"Colombe d'Estourville!" cried François.

"I pray your Majesty to remember that it is Madame d'Etampes who proffers this request. Come, madame, add your prayers to mine," he added, causing a corner of the letter to protrude from his pocket, "for if you are silent much longer, his Majesty will think that you make the request solely from a desire to oblige me."

"Is it true that you desire this marriage, madame?" inquired François.

"Yes, Sire," murmured Madame d'Etampes; "I do desire it — earnestly."

The adverb was extracted by a fresh exhibition of the letter.

"But how do I know," said the king, "that the provost will accept for his son in law a nameless, penniless youth?"

"In the first place, Sire," Benvenuto replied, "the provost, being a loyal subject, will surely have no other will than his king's. In the second place, Ascanio is not nameless; he is a Gaddo Gaddi, and one of his ancestors was Podesta of Florence. He is a goldsmith,

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it is true, but in Italy it is no disgrace to belong to that guild. Furthermore, even if he could boast of no ancient nobility, as I am at liberty to insert his name in the letters patent which have been forwarded to me by your Majesty's directions, he will be a nobleman of recent creation. Oh, think not that it requires any sacrifice on my part to resign in his favor. To reward my Ascanio is to reward myself twice over. So it is settled, Sire, that he is Séigneur de Nesle, and I will not let him want for money. He may, if he will, lay aside his profession, and buy a company of lances, or an appointment at court. I will provide the funds."

"And we shall look to it, you may be sure, that your generosity does not lighten your purse too much."

"Then I may consider, Sire —"

"Ascanio Gaddo Gaddi, Seigneur de Nesle, let it be!" cried the king, laughing heartily: the certainty that Madame d'Etampes was faithful to him had put him in a joyous humor.

"Madame," said Cellini, in an undertone, "you cannot in conscience leave the Seigneur de Nesle at the Châtelet; it was well enough for Ascanio."

Madame d'Etampes called an officer of the guards, and whispered a few words, the concluding ones being these: —

"In the king's name!"

"What are you doing, madame?" demanded François.

"Madame d'Etampes is simply sending a messenger for the bridegroom that is to be, Sire," interposed Cellini.

"Where?"

"Where Madame d'Etampes, who knew the king's kindness of heart, bade him await your Majesty's pleasure."

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Fifteen minutes later, the door of the apartment opened, in which were assembled Colombe, the provost, D'Orbec, the Spanish ambassador, and almost the whole court, except Marmagne, who was still confined to his bed. An usher cried, —

"The king!"

François I. entered, leading Diane de Poitiers, and followed by Benvenuto, upon one of whose arms was leaning the Duchesse d'Etampes, and on the other Ascanio, each of them being as pale as the other.

At the announcement made by the usher, all the courtiers turned, and all were paralyzed for a moment when they saw this strange group.

Their astonishment redoubled when the king, stepping aside to allow the sculptor to pass in front of him, said in a loud voice: —

"Master Benvenuto, take our place for the moment, and our authority; speak as if you were the king, and be obeyed as a king should be."

"Beware, Sire," replied the goldsmith: "in order to fill your place fittingly, I propose to be magnificent."

"Go on, Benvenuto," said François laughingly; "every magnificent stroke will be a bit of flattery for me."

"Very good, Sire; that puts me at my ease, and I will praise you as much as I can. Do not forget," he continued, "all you who hear me, that the king is speaking by my mouth. Messieurs les Notaires, you have prepared the contract which his Majesty deigns to sign? Insert the names of the contracting parties."

The two notaries seized their pens and made ready to write the names in the two copies of the contract, one of which was to remain in the archives and the other in their office.

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"Of the one part," continued Cellini, "the noble and puissant demoiselle, Colombe d'Estourville."

"Colombe d'Estourville," repeated the notaries, mechanically, while the auditors listened in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Of the other part," continued Cellini, "the most noble and puissant Ascanio Gaddi, Seigneur de Nesle."

"Ascanio Gaddi!" cried the provost and D'Orbec in the same breath.

"A mere artisan!" added the provost bitterly, turning toward the king.

"Ascanio Gaddi, Seigneur de Nesle," repeated Benvenuto, unmoved, "upon whom his Majesty bestows letters of naturalization and the office of Superintendent of the Royal Châteaux."

"If his Majesty so commands, I will obey," said the provost; "but —"

"Ascanio Gaddi," continued Benvenuto, "out of re gard for whom his Majesty grants to Messire Robert d'Estourville, Provost of Paris, the title of Chamberlain."

"Sire, I am ready to sign," said D'Estourville, vanquished at last.

"Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" murmured Colombe, falling back into her chair, "is not all this a dream?"

"And what of me?" cried D'Orbec.

"As for you," rejoined Cellini, continuing his royal functions; "as for you, Comte d'Orbec, I spare you the inquiry which I should be justified in ordering into your conduct. Clemency is a kingly virtue, no less than generosity, is it not, Sire? But here are the contracts, all prepared; let us sign, messieurs, let us sign!"

"He plays the king to perfection," cried François, as happy as a monarch on a vacation.

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He passed the pen to Ascanio, who signed with a trembling hand; Ascanio then passed the pen to Colombe, to whose assistance Madame Diane had gone in pure kindness of heart. The hands of the lovers met, and they almost swooned.

Next came Madame Diane, who passed the pen to the Duchesse d'Etampes, who passed it to the provost, the provost to D'Orbec, and D'Orbec to the Spanish ambassador.

Below all these great names Cellini wrote his own in a firm, distinct hand. And yet he was not the one who had made the least painful sacrifice.

After writing his name, the Spanish ambassador drew nigh the duchess.

"Our plans still hold, madame?" he asked.

"Mon Dieu!" she replied, "do what you choose: what matters France or the world to me?"

The duke bowed. As he resumed his place, his nephew, a young and inexperienced diplomat, remarked: —

"So it is the Emperor's purpose that not the King of France, but his son, shall be Duke of Milan?"

"Neither the one nor the other will be," replied the ambassador.

Meanwhile other signatures were being affixed.

When every one had written his name as a subscriber to the happiness of Colombe and Ascanio, Benvenuto walked up to the king, and knelt upon one knee before him.

"Sire," said he, "having issued commands as king I now prefer a request as your Majesty's humble and grateful servant. Will your Majesty deign to grant me one last favor?"

"Say on, Benvenuto, say on!" returned François,

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who was in a granting mood, and who discovered anew that it was the prerogative of royalty wherein, take it for all in all, a king finds the most pleasure; "what do you desire?"

"To return to Italy, sire," said Benvenuto.

"What does this mean?" cried the king; "you wish to leave me when you have so many masterpieces still in hand for me? I 'll not have it."

"Sire," replied Benvenuto, "I will return, I give you my word. But let me go, let me see my country once more, for I feel the need of it just now. I do not talk of my suffering," he continued, lowering his voice and shaking his head sadly, "but I have many causes of sorrow which I could not describe, and nothing but the air of my native land can heal my wounded heart. You are a great and generous king, to whom I am deeply attached. I will return, Sire, but let me go now and be cured in the bright sunlight of the South. I leave with you Ascanio, my brain, and Pagolo, my hand; they will suffice to carry out your artistic dreams until my return; and when I have received the soft kisses of the breezes of Florence, my mother, I will return to you, my king, and death alone shall part us."

"Go if you will," said François, sadly; "it is fitting that art should be free as the swallows: go!"

He gave Benvenuto his hand, which the artist kissed with all the fervor of heartfelt gratitude.

As they withdrew, Benvenuto found himself by the duchess's side.

"Are you very angry with me, madame?" said he, slipping into her hand the fatal letter which, like a magic talisman, had accomplished impossibilities.

"No," said the duchess, overjoyed to have it in her possession at last; "and yet you defeated me by means —"

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"Go to!" said Benvenuto; "I threatened you with them, but do you think I would have used them?"

"God in heaven!" cried the duchess, as if the light had suddenly come to her; "that is what it is to have thought that you were like myself!"

The next day, Ascanio and Colombe were married in the chapel at the Louvre, and, notwithstanding the rules of etiquette, the young people obtained permission for Jacques Aubry and his wife to be present.

It was a signal favor, but we must agree that the poor student had well merited it.

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XXIII.

MARIAGE DE CONVENANCE.

A WEEK later, Hermann solemnly espoused Dame Perrine, who brought him as her marriage portion twenty thousand Tours livres, and the assurance that he would soon be a father.

We hasten to say that this assurance had much more to do with the honest German's determination than the twenty thousand Tours livres.

On the evening following the marriage of Colombe and Ascanio, Benvenuto set out for Florence, despite the entreaties of the young husband and wife.

During his stay in Italy, he cast the statue of Perseus, which still adorns the square of the Old Palace, and which was his most beautiful work, — for no other reason, perhaps, than that he executed it at the period of his greatest sorrow.

THE END.

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